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Ear, Nose, and Throat Doctors Warn of the Many Dangers of Exposing Children to Cigarette Smoke

February is Kids ENT Health Month

Alexandria, VA – Despite how far the U.S. has come in its ongoing fight to help people avoid the dangers of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products, millions of children are still at risk for being exposed to the dangers of secondhand and “third-hand smoke” that can cause a number of health problems such as head and neck cancer, upper respiratory tract disorders, tooth decay, and behavioral issues. In honor of Kids ENT Health month this February, the American Academy of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS) reinforces the need for public awareness on the dangers to children of tobacco smoke.

The term “third-hand smoke” is a relatively new phrase that describes the chemical contaminants from cigarette smoke that remain in the air and on surfaces even after the cigarette is extinguished. These chemicals linger for a long period of time and can be reabsorbed into the body if inhaled or ingested.

A recent study in the medical journal *Pediatrics* found that of adults surveyed, the impact of third-hand smoke is less well known to the public than other smoking-related risks. Since the term is so new, the researchers asked people if they agreed with the statement that “breathing air in a room today where people smoked yesterday can harm the health of infants and children.” Only 65 percent of nonsmokers and 43 percent of smokers agreed with that statement.

Secondhand smoke is a combination of the smoke from a burning cigarette and the smoke exhaled by a smoker. Also known as environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), it can be recognized easily by its distinctive odor. ETS contaminates the air and is retained in clothing, curtains and furniture. Beyond being unpleasant, annoying, and irritating to the eyes and nose, ETS represents a dangerous health hazard. Over 4,000 different chemicals have been identified in ETS, and at least 43 of these chemicals cause cancer.

Furthermore, on average, children are exposed to more secondhand smoke than nonsmoking adults. The AAO-HNS warns parents and caregivers that exposing children to any kind of tobacco smoke is dangerous to their health and could result in immediate health problems like triggering an asthma attack, to long-term issues like tooth decay and chronic ear infections that can lead to hearing loss if left untreated.

The AAO-HNS recommends the following ways to help limit a child’s exposure to tobacco smoke:

- First, and most importantly, if you do smoke, stop. Consult your physician for help, if needed. There are many new resources available to help you quit from medications to support groups.
- Consider a home/car smoking ban. Do not allow anyone to smoke anywhere in your home or at any time in your car. Studies have shown that parents who enforce a no-smoking ban at home are less likely to have teens who experiment with cigarettes.
- Finally, if you used to allow regular smoking in your home, consider replacing low-cost items like throw pillows, area rugs, and curtains. For items like couches and rugs, consider a thorough steam cleaning which can help reduce the amount of dangerous particles, pollutants, and allergens that are trapped in their fibers.

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**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
OTOLARYNGOLOGY–
HEAD AND NECK SURGERY**

NEWS RELEASE

Kids ENT Health Month - an annual national public information campaign to inform the public about pediatric ear, nose, and throat disorders - will be observed in February 2009. This initiative, first launched in 2003 by the AAO-HNS, seeks to advise parents and caregivers that ear, nose, and throat disorders remain among the primary reasons children and adolescents visit a physician.

A Q & A about “third-hand smoke” with Dr. Nancy Snyderman, NBC senior medical editor and AAO-HNS member, is available online at <http://www.entnet.org/kidsent/>. Additional public information materials are also available on kids’ ear, nose, and throat health.

About the AAO-HNS

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents nearly 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The organization's vision: "Empowering otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care."

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