



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Clearing the Air

Reduced Hospitalizations for Acute Myocardial Infarction After Implementation of a Smoke-Free Ordinance — City of Pueblo, Colorado, 2002–2006

Recorded: January 20, 2008; posted: January 22, 2009

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Just because you don't smoke doesn't mean you're not at risk for the negative health consequences of cigarette smoke. Breathing secondhand smoke — the smoke from someone else's cigarette — can have both immediate and long term effects on your heart. The Surgeon General has said that the only way to fully protect nonsmokers is to eliminate smoking indoors. A recent study in Pueblo, Colorado found that a law prohibiting smoking in indoor workplaces and public places resulted in significant decreases in hospitalizations for heart attacks.

Dr. Rachel Kaufmann is a researcher with CDC's Office on Smoking and Health and she's joining us today to discuss these findings, as well as the dangers of secondhand smoke. Welcome to the show, Rachel.

[Dr. Kaufmann] Well, thanks for inviting me, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Rachel, previous studies have reported that smoke-free laws are associated with reductions in heart attack hospitalizations. What did this most recent study add to those findings?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Well, the researchers in Colorado tracked heart attacks for three full years after a smoke-free law was implemented and found that heart attack hospitalizations decreased dramatically in the first year-and-a-half, but then continued to fall in the next year-and-a-half, for a total decrease of 41 percent in the rate. And this was the first study to show that the health protection was sustained over a full three year period.

[Dr. Gaynes] So are there estimates as to how many people get sick or die from secondhand smoke, nationwide?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Yes, there are. It's estimated that about 46,000 American nonsmokers die every year from heart disease as a result of secondhand smoke exposure, and an estimated 4,000 more die from lung cancer and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, also related to secondhand smoke exposure.

[Dr. Gaynes] Rachel, how long does it take for someone to suffer health problems from secondhand smoke?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Well, some effects, such as triggering asthma attacks or heart attacks, may happen very quickly. Other effects, such as developing heart disease or lung cancer, would occur over many years.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is breathing someone else's cigarette smoke just as dangerous as smoking a cigarette yourself?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Actually, secondhand smoke is similar to the smoke inhaled directly by a smoker; it contains poisons, cancer-causing toxins, and while nonsmokers will inhale less smoke, the Surgeon General has concluded that there is no safe level of secondhand smoke.

[Dr. Gaynes] How many states have some form of restriction on public smoking now?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Well, by CDC's count, 17 states and the District of Columbia have comprehensive laws in effect. They make private workplaces, restaurants, and bars smoke-free. And then a number of other states have less comprehensive smoking restrictions, and many communities have also implemented comprehensive local smoke-free laws. So currently, almost 40 percent of Americans live under comprehensive smoke-free laws, and that's actually up from one percent in the year 2000.

[Dr. Gaynes] Rachel, does there appear to be strong public support for these smoking restrictions?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Yes. Evidence shows that smoke-free laws usually receive high levels of public support and compliance, and, in fact, public support typically increases over time.

[Dr. Gaynes] What can an individual do to protect themselves from secondhand smoke?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Well, first of all, it's important to avoid indoor spaces where smoking is permitted and to not allow smoking in your own home or car at all. Parents should also make sure that their children's day care centers and schools are smoke-free. And of course, the single most important step that smokers can take to protect both their own health and that of their family is to quit smoking.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about the dangers of secondhand smoke?

[Dr. Kaufmann] Our website is www.cdc.gov/tobacco, and smokers who want help quitting can call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Rachel. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Rachel Kaufmann about the dangers of secondhand smoke.

Remember, secondhand smoke *is* dangerous. Avoid those public places where smoking is permitted and if you are a smoker, quit now.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.