

SAMPLE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH LETTER

To Whom It May Concern:

There is no known safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS).

Second-hand smoke is more than a nuisance—it is a toxic mix of more than 4,000 chemicals. In 1992 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classified SHS as a “Group A” (known human) carcinogen. This category is reserved for the most dangerous compounds that have been proven to cause cancer in humans. Over fifty cancer-causing chemicals have been found in SHS, including arsenic, cadmium, benzene and vinyl chloride. In 2005 the California Air Resources Board identified SHS as a “Toxic Air Contaminant.”

Short-term consequences of SHS exposure include irritation of the eyes, nose, throat and respiratory system. Many non-smokers also report headaches, dizziness and nausea. Individuals with diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, emphysema, bronchitis or vascular disease are particularly vulnerable.

Health Canada reports that over 1,000 non-smokers will die this year in Canada due to long-term exposure to SHS: in excess of 700 deaths from coronary heart disease and over 300 from lung cancer. Long-term exposure also causes the following in adults:

- Breast cancer in younger, primarily pre-menopausal women
- Nasal sinus cancer
- Asthma and adverse lung function

Second-hand smoke hurts everyone, but is particularly dangerous to babies and children because their lungs and immune systems are still developing. Among other things, SHS causes the following health problems in children:

- Pneumonia and bronchitis
- Asthma
- Chronic cough, phlegm, wheezing and breathlessness
- Ear infections
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)



Health Canada also reports that SHS can cling to rugs, curtains, clothes, food and other materials, and can usually remain in a room or car long after someone has smoked there. Smoke can also travel through open windows or doors, through cracks and gaps, electrical outlets or ventilation systems. Smoke travels great distances; smoke from one room can easily spread to other rooms.

Studies have shown that SHS is a major source of indoor air pollution, and that no level of ventilation will eliminate the harmful effects of SHS. Even air filters (air purifiers) are not enough, as they are designed to remove fine smoke particles from the air but are not capable of removing the dangerous gases that can cause disease.

I recommend that everyone make all reasonable efforts to eliminate their involuntary exposure to second-hand smoke where they live, work and play.

Sincerely,

Medical Officer of Health