

Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke poses major health risks for both children and adults. Unlike adults, children do not have the understanding, ability or power to avoid exposure to other people's smoke.

In family day care, where the care environment is also a family home, schemes need to develop clear strategies to ensure that the carer's home is a safe place for children, while recognising the rights and needs of the carer's family. Effective communication is the key to ensuring that carers and their families have a clear and agreed understanding of how a safe environment will be maintained for children while they are in care.

Children attending family day care schemes have the right to experience quality care in a smoke free environment, and it is the duty of staff and carers to ensure that children's exposure to involuntary smoke inhalation is prevented. It is also important that adults responsible for children model positive and healthy behaviours as children often learn and emulate the actions of adults.

What is passive smoking?

Environmental tobacco smoke consists of two different types of smoke:

- exhaled mainstream smoke which is the smoke breathed out by a person smoking a burning cigarette
- side-stream smoke which is the smoke that is released from a burning cigarette

Passive smoking is the inhalation of environmental tobacco smoke, which is made up of exhaled mainstream smoke and side-stream smoke.

It is also unpleasant, and possibly harmful, for children to be exposed to residual tobacco smoke that clings to clothing and soft furnishings.

What hazards does environmental smoke pose for children's health?

In children passive smoking can contribute to the following conditions:

- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS or cot death)
- lower birth weight, resulting from exposure to tobacco smoke in-utero
- bronchitis, pneumonia and other airway infections
- asthma
- middle ear disease
- respiratory symptoms (coughing, wheezing)

Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke for children can lead to:

- adverse effects on cognition and behaviour
- decreased lung function
- worsening of cystic fibrosis
- meningococcal disease

How can carers maintain a smoke free environment?

All family day carers have a responsibility to ensure that no tobacco is smoked in any part of the premises while children are in care. This may be potentially problematic for carers who have other household members and/or visitors to their home that smoke. In this situation carers can plan in advance how they will promote and maintain a smoke free environment for children in their care. Some useful strategies that carers may be able to use to do this include:

- discussing with other household members how to maintain a smoke free environment when children are in care prior to family day care commencing in the home. Carers must ensure that other household members understand and comply with requirements for maintaining a smoke free environment when care is being offered
- where possible, suggesting spaces outside the premises where other household members and/or visitors may smoke
- clearly display signs showing where smoking is not permitted
- understand and explain the scheme's smoke free policy to other household members, families, and visitors
- in some instances, carers may be able to keep sections, or the entire family day care environment, smoke free, and not just when children are in care
- where tobacco is smoked in the family day care home when children are not in care, carers need to consider issues such as hygiene, ventilation and safe storage of smoking related paraphernalia, such as ashtrays, cigarettes, cigarette lighters and matches

Promoting smoke free environments

It is important that schemes support carers to not only provide a healthy and safe environment for children, but to also ensure that occupational health and safety requirements are met by carers in family day care homes. To assist carers to maintain smoke free environments, schemes can:

- develop and implement smoke free environment policies that incorporate current information and recommendations from recognised health authorities
- involve all scheme stakeholders in the development, implementation and regular review of the smoke free environment policy
- clearly inform families, staff, carers and visitors to the scheme of the smoke free environment policy and their responsibilities according to the policy
- provide families, staff, carers and visitors to the scheme with current information obtained from recognised health authorities about the risks associated with both passive and non-passive smoking
- minimise the risk of children observing people smoking, including images that may be accessed by children through photographs, magazines, television, videos, computer games or the internet
- provide carers with a range of professional development opportunities to increase their knowledge about health and safety issues and the management of these in family day care settings

NCAC Resources

To assist children's services to develop their own smoke free policies, NCAC has produced a *NCAC Sample Policy Template* on smoke free environments. This is available on NCAC's website as part of the *NCAC Policy Development Guide*, and may also be obtained by telephoning NCAC.

It is important to note that *NCAC Sample Policy Templates* are designed to assist services to develop individualised policies in consultation with stakeholders that reflect the needs and interests of each service. They are not intended for use as generic policies whereby services 'fill in the blanks'.

NCAC has also developed an *NCAC Smoke Free Environments for Children Position Statement (October 2006)*, which is also available from the NCAC website or by contacting NCAC.

Passive and non-passive smoking presents significant health risks for both children and adults. There are three fundamental approaches that schemes can adopt to minimise risks to children in relation to other people's smoking. These are:

- ensuring that children are cared for in smoke free environments
- preventing children from witnessing and possibly modelling the behaviours of people that smoke
- providing information to others about the dangers of smoking and strategies for protecting children from the risks associated with passive smoking

References and Further Information

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