



Press statement

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 HOURS WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH 2010

PASSIVE SMOKING MAJOR HEALTH HAZARD TO CHILDREN, SAYS RCP

Passive smoking in the home is a major hazard to the health of the millions of children in the UK who live with smokers. ‘**Passive smoking and children**’, a major new report launched today from the Tobacco Advisory Group of the **Royal College of Physicians** says that children are particularly vulnerable to passive smoke exposure, most of which occurs in the home. About **2 million children** currently live in a household where they are exposed to cigarette smoke, and many more are exposed outside the home.

Using evidence-based studies and additional analysis, funded by **Cancer Research UK** and carried out by the **UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies**, partly based at Nottingham University, the report contains alarming new estimates for key measures of health damage attributable to passive smoking, which for children each year causes:

- **Over 20,000 cases of lower respiratory tract infection**
- **120,000 cases of middle ear disease**
- **At least 22,000 new cases of wheeze and asthma**
- **200 cases of bacterial meningitis**
- **40 sudden infant deaths – one in five of all SIDs**

Each year, these cases generate over 300,000 UK GP consultations and about 9,500 hospital admissions, and cost the NHS about £23.3 million.

The report highlights the most important factors governing exposure to children, which are whether their parents or carers smoke, and whether smoking is allowed in the home. Relative to children in non-smoking families, passive smoke exposure is around **three times higher** if the father smokes, **over six times higher** if the mother smokes, and **nearly nine times higher** if both parents smoke. Smoking by other carers is also a significant source of passive smoke exposure. Children growing up with parents or siblings who smoke are also **90% more likely** to become smokers themselves.

In addition to the burden of disease, passive smoking also places a large financial burden on the NHS – at least **£9.7 million** each year in UK primary care visits and asthma treatment costs, **£13.6 million** in UK hospital admissions, and **£4 million** on asthma drugs for children up to the age of 16. The future treatment costs of smokers who take up smoking as a consequence of exposure to smoking by parents could be as high as **£5.7 million** each year. The report also covers the ethics of children and passive smoking, and public opinion on smoke-free policy. It makes a series of strong policy recommendations to reduce the burden of passive smoking on children, **a burden which is entirely avoidable:**

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- The most effective means of protecting children from passive smoking is to reduce the prevalence of smoking in adults, and particularly parents and other carers
- So far, reductions in smoking prevalence have been much less marked in younger than older adults
- Tobacco control initiatives at population and individual level therefore need to be adapted and improved to target younger adults more effectively
- This will require a comprehensive strategy including: sustained increases in the real price of tobacco; further reduction in smuggling and illicit trade; investment in new and innovative mass media campaigns targeting smoking in younger adults; more effective health warnings; generic standardised packaging; tailored cessation services; and a range of other policies
- Specific measures to prevent uptake of smoking, by preventing exposure of children to smoking in public and in the media; reducing the number and accessibility of tobacco retailers to children, imposing strict penalties on those who sell to children, and promoting peer-led and other school-based interventions are also needed
- It is important to promote smoke-free homes through mass media campaigns, advice and support from health professionals to smokers, and new approaches such as substituting cigarettes with medicinal nicotine
- Smoke-free legislation should be extended much more widely, to include public places frequented by children and young people, and to prohibit all smoking in cars and other vehicles; media campaigns are needed to explain the need to avoid exposing children to smoking as well as to smoke
- Governments and individuals have a duty to protect children from exposure to smoke and to smoking
- There is public support for more comprehensive tobacco control policies, and a strong ethical justification for these measures.

The Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, who wrote the Foreword to the report, said:

“I very much welcome this report which clearly sets out the danger to children from exposure to secondhand smoke. This is a serious public health concern. In my 2002 Annual Report I highlighted children's special vulnerability to secondhand smoke. The report's recommendations align very well with the Government's ten year vision for tobacco control set out in its new strategy for England, ‘A Smokefree Future’. Among the many commitments in that report are plans to do more to reduce smoking in homes and cars in which children are present. The report is a very valuable addition to the evidence base which will be considered as part of the Department of Health's review of the existing smokefree legislation in England three years after it came into force, to be carried out later this year.”

Professor John Britton, Chair of the RCP Tobacco Advisory Group said:
“This report isn't just about protecting children from passive smoking, it's about taking smoking completely out of children's lives.”

Professor Terence Stephenson, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), which is supporting the report, said:

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"The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has recently led on the call to ban smoking in cars with children travelling in them. We should be making cars totally smoke-free if there are children travelling in them. Second-hand smoke has been found to be strongly linked to chest infections in children, asthma, ear problems and sudden infant death syndrome, or cot death. We strongly support the policy recommendations in this new report and repeat the call for new approaches to address this problem so that we protect the health of children and young people."

Notes to Editors

The report will be launched at an **embargoed press conference at 11.00 am on Tuesday 23 March at the RCP, with an embargo time of 00.01 hours Wednesday 24 March 2010. The press conference will be chaired by Professor John Britton, Chair of the RCP's Tobacco Advisory Group and Director of the UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies, and feature authors of key chapters in the report.** For further information please contact Linda Cuthbertson, RCP PR Manager on 020 3075 1254, 07748 777919, linda.cuthbertson@rcplondon.ac.uk. The Royal College of Physicians is at 11 St Andrews Place, Regent's Park, London NE1 4LE, nearest tube stations are Great Portland Street and Regent's Park. For a map see our website: <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/Pages/Find-us.aspx>

'Passive Smoking and Children' costs £20 and can be ordered from the RCP Publications Department at <http://bookshop.rcplondon.ac.uk/>

The Royal College of Physicians of London provides a huge range of services to its 24,000 Members and Fellows and other medical professionals. These include delivering examinations, training courses, continuous professional development and conferences; undertaking clinical audits; publishing newsletters, guidelines and books through to maintaining the College's historical collections. We also lead medical debate, and lobby and advise government and other decision-makers on behalf of our members.

About Cancer Research UK

- Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to beating cancer through research.
- The charity's groundbreaking work into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives. This work is funded entirely by the public.
- Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates double in the last thirty years.
- Cancer Research UK supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of more than 4,800 scientists, doctors and nurses.
- Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to beat cancer.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 020 7121 6699 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org

The **UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies (UKCTCS)** is a UKCRC Public Health Research Centre of Excellence with funding from the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the National Institute for Health Research. For more information visit www.ukctcs.org

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