

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Committee on Genetics and Environmental Hazards

The Environmental Consequences of Tobacco Smoking: Implications for Public Policies That Affect the Health of Children

The human health consequences of cigarette smoking have been more thoroughly studied than those of any other environment exposure. According to the 1979 publication, *Smoking and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*,¹ and the 1982 *Surgeon General's Report on the Health Consequences of Smoking*,² specific mortality ratios are directly proportional to the years of cigarette smoking, and they are higher for those who initiated smoking at younger ages. Smoking contributes to mortality from lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, and non-neoplastic bronchopulmonary disease; and it increases the risk of cancer from exposure to other carcinogens, such as asbestos. Birth weight and fetal growth may also be adversely affected by smoking during pregnancy. Despite their efforts to educate young patients about the dangers of smoking, it is alarming to pediatricians that the incidence of daily smoking among high school seniors is still 20%.²

Although the direct effects of cigarette smoking on the smoker are generally accepted, and less attention has been paid to the environmental hazard created by smokers for the nonsmoker, these effects also are addressed in the Surgeon General's report. Tobacco and tobacco smoke act as antigens and sensitize T lymphocytes. The lighted cigarette generates approximately 4,000 compounds, including gases and particulate phases. Cigarette smoking in enclosed areas can produce concentrations of carbon monoxide well above the ambient air quality standard, even when ventilation is otherwise adequate. In comparison with children of nonsmokers, children of parents who smoke have more bronchitis and pneumonia and reduced pulmonary func-

tion. Nonsmokers who are chronically exposed to tobacco smoke have reduced function of small airways comparable to that found in light smokers. For these reasons, the Committee considers tobacco smoking to constitute one of the most important sources of environmental contamination and a significant threat to the health of children. The Committee recommends that physicians increase their efforts to inform parents about the environmental hazards of smoking, particularly to their children. In addition, the Committee urges physicians to support legislation prohibiting smoking in public places frequented by children, particularly in hospitals and other health facilities. Also, pediatricians should provide an example to young patients by not smoking.

Although public education has been minimally effective in reducing the number of cigarettes consumed per capita, recent experience with regard to the use of gasoline and heating oil suggests that a more effective method for reducing consumption is to increase cost. In that context, the Committee finds it incongruous that, in spite of all the scientific evidence summarized in the Surgeon General's report indicating that tobacco is a health hazard, the federal government continues to subsidize the production of tobacco. The Committee believes that removal of the various support programs provided to tobacco growers and the tobacco industry is long overdue.

Major pediatric societies have repeatedly called for additional federal funding of research directed toward the improvement of maternal and child health, but such funding has been limited recently by the effort to reduce federal spending. Therefore, the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends that all direct and indirect support by local, state, or federal governments of the production, distribution, or consumption of tobacco and

tobacco products be phased out as rapidly as possible. Such funds would be better used for the support of research and education.

Robert M. Heavenrich, MD
Irving H. Mauss, MD
John L. Stevenson, MD

COMMITTEE ON GENETICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL
HAZARDS

Environmental Subcommittee
Laurence Finberg, MD, Chairman
Joseph M. Garfunkel, MD
Stephen H. Gehlbach, MD
John W. Graef, MD
James W. Hanson, MD

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2. US Department of Health and Human Services: *The Health Consequences of Smoking: Cancer*. Rockville, MD, 1982
3. Warner KE: Cigarette smoking in the 1970's: The impact of the antismoking campaign on consumption. *Science* 211:729, 1981

DELINQUENT STUDENT LOANS

A Federal crackdown on doctors, dentists and other professionals who are not repaying student loans on time shows that 63,000 of them are delinquent in paying nearly \$31 million.

The breakdown showed that 7,000 medical doctors owed \$5.2 million in delinquent payments; 340 osteopaths owed \$271,000; 3,700 dentists owed \$3.1 million, and 626 optometrists owed \$502,000.

Richard McGowan, a spokesman for the inspector general's office, said 401 doctors who owed a total of \$443,000 on their loans had received more than \$10 million from Medicare and Medicaid in the last two years.

Eighty-three faculty members at 17 medical schools and 80 doctors employed by the Health and Human Services department are delinquent in repaying their loans, he said.

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