



News Release

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Smoking bans' positive impact on child health backed by study

Childhood chest infections needing hospital care may have dropped by as much as 20 per cent since anti-smoking laws were introduced, research suggests.

The findings add to previous evidence that tobacco control policies are associated with reductions in hospital admissions for asthma attacks among children and have also helped to cut rates of premature births.

Experts say the latest study – which includes data from more than 57 million births and 2.7 million hospital admissions – offers the most complete analysis so far of the positive impact that tobacco control policies are having on children's health worldwide.

Researchers led by the University of Edinburgh and the Erasmus University Medical Centre (Erasmus MC) in the Netherlands combined data from 41 studies from North America, Europe and China where tobacco control policies have been introduced.

Figures suggest that rates of children needing hospital care for severe chest infections have fallen by more than 18 per cent since anti-smoking laws were introduced.

In line with earlier research, the study estimates that severe asthma attacks have fallen by almost 10 per cent while the number of babies born premature has dropped by around four per cent overall.

Raising taxes on tobacco products may also have improved child health, the researchers say, but the findings were less conclusive.

About half of all children globally are regularly exposed to tobacco smoke.

Children who breathe second hand smoke are more prone to serious chest infections such as pneumonia and bronchitis. They are more likely to develop asthma and attacks can be more severe, needing hospital care.

Babies of mothers who smoke during pregnancy have a higher chance of being born early, which exposes them to health complications in later life.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The global economic cost of health complications from tobacco use is estimated to be around USD\$1.4 trillion.

The study, published in *The Lancet Public Health*, was funded by the Chief Scientist Office of Scotland, The Farr Institute, the Netherlands Lung Foundation and the Erasmus Medical Centre.

Dr Jasper Been, of the Erasmus Medical Centre in the Netherlands, said: “Our study demonstrates that children’s health benefits substantially from smoke-free laws and raising tobacco prices. To protect the health of some of the most vulnerable members of society, implementation of such tobacco control policies should be accelerated across the globe. The effectiveness of additional strategies also needs to be evaluated.”

Professor Aziz Sheikh, Director of the University of Edinburgh’s Usher Institute and the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research, said: “Our evaluation provides compelling evidence of the considerable impact of tobacco control policies on child health. This work should spur governments to take action to implement tried and tested policies – strongly advocated by the World Health Organization – to reduce second-hand smoke exposure and improve a range of important health outcomes in infants and children.”

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