Who is most likely to be exposed to thirdhand smoke?

Infants and young children are the most likely to be exposed to thirdhand smoke for three reasons:

1. Infants and young children spend more time indoors than adults and they explore their environment with their hands and bodies. Before they can walk, they move about by scooting along the floor—basically acting like a dust mop. Because of their size, they fit into small spaces where dust and particles might collect. Through these activities, their hands, mouth, hair, clothes, and toys can collect thirdhand smoke that can enter their bodies not just through their skin, but also through their lungs and mouths.

2. Infants and young children put everything into their mouths: their own hands, toys, blankets; their parents' fingers, their car seat strap, the sock they find under the desk—just about anything they can find goes into their mouths. “Anything they can find” can also include everyday objects parents may use to distract a child, such as a cell phone, car keys, or the TV remote. The surfaces of these objects can be contaminated with thirdhand smoke acquired from the air or dust, and when children put them in their mouths, thirdhand smoke chemicals enter their bodies.

3. The respiratory systems of infants and young children are developing, and they breathe more times each minute than an adult, even when they are at rest. Compared to adults, they breathe in more air relative to their body size. This means that, in relation to their size, they can breathe in more thirdhand smoke than adults. Their immune systems are also developing, making them more vulnerable to the effects of tobacco pollutants than adults.

Sources


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