Should I worry that my dog is being exposed to thirdhand smoke?

If your dog spends a lot of time indoors in an indoor environment that contains lingering tobacco smoke residue, there is a good chance that your dog is exposed to toxic thirdhand smoke. Like small children, dogs spend a lot of time on or close to the floor. The toxic residue of thirdhand smoke is concentrated at floor level, in house dust, carpets, and rugs. In many households, dogs also spend a lot of time snuggled with their human companions on couches, chairs, and beds. Furniture, especially furniture with cloth coverings, acts like a sponge for thirdhand smoke, absorbing the residue right into the fabric itself. The residue gets on to your dog's fur, so the dog is literally carrying it around everywhere.

Dogs can absorb the residue through their skin, and they can ingest it by licking it right off of their fur, toys, and hands of someone who smoked. Indoors, dogs also can inhale the contaminated house dust or the ultra-fine particles and gases that are released back into the air.

We know that breathing ultra-fine particles can make a dog's breathing problems worse. Your dog's breed influences the health effects of tobacco smoke exposure. Breeds with long noses, such as Greyhounds, have a higher risk of nose cancer than breeds with short noses. Breeds with short noses, such as Bulldogs, have a higher risk of lung cancer than breeds with long noses. A dog's nose is an efficient filter. Dogs with shorter noses have a smaller filter, so toxic particles are not stopped in the nose but get all the way to the lungs where they can cause harm. Dogs with longer noses have a larger filter, so more of the toxic particles are stopped before they get to the lungs, but they get stuck in the nose and sinuses where they can cause harm.

Your “fur baby” can't make a choice to avoid second- or thirdhand smoke, but you can! Take these simple steps:

- Don't let anyone smoke around your dog, whether inside or outside
- Don't let anyone bring thirdhand smoke into your dog's home
- Don't move your dog into a new home that contains thirdhand smoke. Before moving to a new home, ask about smoking policies and habits of previous residents

Sources


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