

THIRDHAND

SMOKE Resource Center

How long does thirdhand smoke last?

In homes where tobacco has been smoked regularly over many years, the thirdhand smoke residue is likely to be embedded in materials throughout the home. These reservoirs of pollution can be very persistent. For instance, we have found thirdhand smoke on surfaces years after the last known cigarette was smoked.

In one case, after a person who had smoked in the home moved out, the home was cleaned and remained empty for months. Still, thirdhand smoke levels on household surfaces were similar to those found in the homes of active smokers.

In a second case, a person with a lifelong one-pack per day habit successfully quit. More than five years later, thirdhand smoke levels on their household furniture were at amounts commonly found in homes of active smokers.

In a recent study, thirdhand smoke was found in every apartment tested (220) with smoke-free tenants living in smoke-free apartments. Of those tested, about 10% had thirdhand smoke levels on surfaces that were similar to amounts found in apartments where people actively smoked indoors. Toxic thirdhand smoke residue is widespread and persistent. Although it can be challenging to remove existing thirdhand smoke, guidance is available below. To prevent the accumulation of thirdhand smoke in your home, do not allow anyone to smoke in or around you, your home, or your vehicle.

Updated: August 2022

Sources

Matt GE, Quintana PJE, Hoh E, Zakarian J, Dodder NG, Record R., Hovell M, Mahabee-

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