

State of Alaska
Epidemiology



Bulletin

Recommendations
and
Reports

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Environmental Tobacco Smoke in Alaska

Part 4 of a 5-Part Series

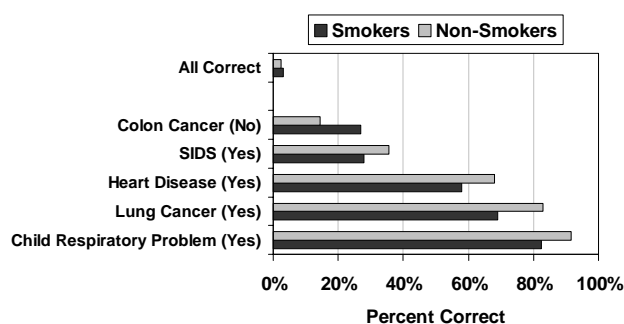
Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), also known as secondhand smoke, causes illness and death in both children and adults. Children exposed to ETS are at increased risk of middle ear infections and a variety of respiratory conditions—some of which are fatal.¹ Pregnant women exposed to ETS are at increased risk for having a low birth weight baby.² Exposure to ETS causes an estimated 3,000 lung cancer deaths and 35,000 to 62,000 ischemic heart disease deaths in non-smoking adults each year.^{3,4} The elimination of exposure to ETS is one of four key goals identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a means to limit the health and economic burden caused by tobacco.⁵ This summary of exposure to and attitudes toward ETS in Alaska is the fourth in a series of Bulletins that describe Alaska's heavy burden of tobacco-related disease, as reported in the new publication: *Tobacco in the Great Land: A Portrait of Alaska's Leading Cause of Death*.

Knowledge and Beliefs About ETS

The overwhelming majority of Alaskan adolescents and adults—smokers and non-smokers alike—share the belief that exposure to ETS is harmful. Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data from 2003 indicate that 89% of high school students who smoke and 98% of those who do not smoke consider ETS harmful.⁶ Similarly, the 2003 Adult Tobacco Survey (ATS) shows that 86% of smoking and 96% of non-smoking adults describe breathing smoke from other people's cigarettes as harmful or very harmful.⁷

Despite this high level of awareness that ETS can harm one's health, a thorough understanding of the exact nature of the risks posed by ETS appears to be lacking. Figure 1 shows the proportions of both adult smokers and non-smokers who correctly identified whether each health consequence was associated with ETS exposure.⁸ In general, non-smokers were more likely to link ETS with each health outcome. While the majority of both smokers and non-smokers correctly agreed that ETS was linked with child respiratory problems, lung cancer, and heart disease, only about one-third knew that sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS, was a possible consequence of ETS exposure. Furthermore, a large proportion of respondents incorrectly identified colon cancer as an ETS health consequence. Largely due to this misconception, fewer than 5% of smokers and non-smokers correctly classified all five health outcomes as to their association with ETS.

Figure 1. Percentage of Adults Correctly Identifying Health Consequences of Secondhand Smoke, By Smoking Status, Alaska ATS, 2003



Attitudes About Indoor Smoking Restrictions

Coupled with the overwhelming agreement that ETS is harmful is the widespread conviction that people should be protected from this hazard. Data from the ATS clearly demonstrate that most Alaskans, regardless of smoking status, believe that people should be protected from smoke from other people's cigarettes (76% of smokers, 92% of non-smokers, 88% overall).⁹ Results from the 2002 Hellenthal and Associates Media Awareness Survey indicate that 70% of Alaskan adults believe that smoking in public places should be controlled by law.¹⁰ As shown in Table 1, support for indoor smoking bans varies considerably depending on the proposed ban site and the smoking status of the respondent. In general, more non-smokers support smoking bans than smokers, but both smokers and non-smokers support bans in places frequented by either children or employees, two groups with limited options to remove themselves from the situation.

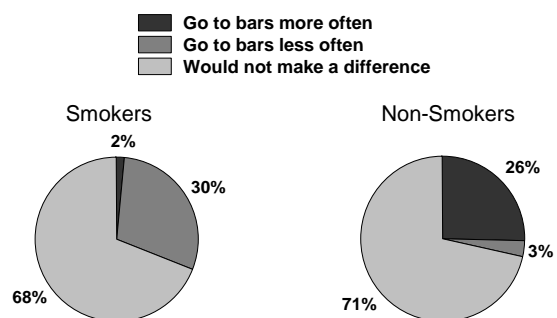
Table 1. Percentage of Adults Who Believe Smoking Should Be Banned Completely in the Specified Site, By Smoking Status

Site	Smokers	Non-Smokers	Overall
Day Care Centers ^a	96%	98%	98%
Schools ^a	92%	97%	96%
School Grounds/School Events ^b	82%	95%	92%
Malls ^b	72%	81%	79%
Indoor Work Areas ^a	60%	80%	75%
Indoor Work Areas ^b	60%	88%	82%
Restaurants ^a	29%	68%	59%
Restaurants ^b	47%	78%	71%
Bars ^b	7%	37%	30%

Data Sources: ^aBRFSS (1998 & 2000); ^bATS (2003)

Although smoking bans in bars are relatively unpopular—especially among smokers, the majority of both smokers and non-smokers report that a complete smoking ban in bars would have little negative impact on their bar patronage. As Figure 2 shows, 70% of smokers and 97% of non-smokers say that such a ban would either make them *more* likely to visit a bar, or would make no difference at all. Similar data assessing likely reactions toward complete smoking bans in restaurants are even more positive, with only 20% of smokers and 5% of non-smokers saying they would visit restaurants less if such bans were enacted.¹¹ Further support for smoking bans appears in the Hellenthal and Associates Media Awareness Survey (2002), which shows that 69% of Alaskan adults would not avoid going someplace where smoking was restricted.¹²

Figure 2. Adults' Reaction if Smoking Banned Completely in Bars, By Smoking Status, Alaska ATS, 2003

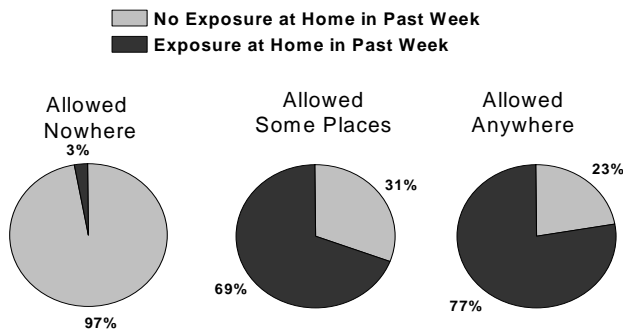


Exposure to ETS

ETS in the Home

Data from the 2003 ATS reveal that smoking is allowed in at least a limited fashion in the homes of 17% of adult Alaskans, with smokers (44%) being much more likely than non-smokers (10%) to report that smoking is allowed in their home.¹³ Not surprisingly, exposure to ETS is much more likely in homes where smoking is allowed than in homes where smoking is banned entirely, with little difference in exposure reported between those houses where smoking is allowed in some places or times versus anywhere (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Exposure to Secondhand Smoke in Home in Past Week, By Rules for Smoking in Home (Adults), Alaska ATS, 2003



Regardless of rules about smoking in the home, 11% of adult non-smokers report being exposed to ETS at home to some extent in the prior month (BRFSS, 1998 & 2000);¹⁴ 4% were exposed to ETS in their home every day during the past week (ATS, 2003).¹⁵ Data from the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS, 1996-2000) reveal that 6% of Alaskan women who delivered live-born infants report that, on an average day, their baby spends at least some time in the same room as someone who is smoking. From 1996 to 2000, the prevalence and average number of hours of ETS exposure decreased from 8.6% to 5.3% and from 6.4 to 4.1 hours, respectively.¹⁶ Although ETS exposure among young children is not directly assessed, ATS data indicate that in 2003, 13% of adults who had children under age 5 living with them reported that someone had smoked in their home on *at least one day* during the past week. Nine percent of adults living with children under age 5 reported ETS in their home *every day* during the past week.¹⁷ Forty-three percent of Alaskan high school students who do not smoke reported being exposed to indoor ETS in the past week.¹⁸

ETS in the Car

Adolescent and adult non-smokers are also exposed to ETS in cars and other enclosed vehicles. As was seen with home ETS, adults who ban smoking in their cars are much less likely to be exposed to car ETS (10%) than are adults who allow smoking in their car (59%).¹⁹ Regardless of rules about smoking in the car, 24% of all Alaskan adults and 12% of non-smokers say they were exposed to car ETS in the past week.²⁰

This type of exposure is even more common among adolescents, perhaps because underage smokers have increasingly fewer alternative locations where their smoking is accepted by others. Recent YRBS data indicate that nearly one in four non-smoking high school students (24%) were exposed to ETS in a car in the past week.²¹ Between indoor and car ETS, 47% of non-smoking Alaskan high school students reported ETS exposure in the past week alone.

ETS at Work

Eighty-five percent of employed adult Alaskans who work mostly indoors reported that smoking is completely banned in their work areas; 86% say smoking is banned in all common areas at work (ATS, 2003).²² ATS data show that although approximately half of employed adults (49%) were exposed to ETS in the past week at workplaces where smoking is allowed, only 3% were exposed at workplaces where smoking is banned.²³ Overall, 9% of employed adults and 7% of employed non-smokers reported exposure to workplace ETS in the past week.²⁴ When ETS in the workplace, home, and car are considered together, 2003 ATS data indicate that 27% of non-smoking Alaskan adults were exposed to ETS in the past week.²⁵

Summary

Although most Alaskan adults and adolescents are aware that ETS is harmful, few appear to have a thorough understanding of the exact nature of the risks posed by ETS. Alaskan adults endorse a high level of support for complete smoking bans in many locations, particularly where children or employees are involved. Notably, even when they don't fully support banning smoking at a site, as with bars, the majority of Alaskans claim that a complete smoking ban would have little negative impact on their patronage of those establishments. With regard to rules about smoking in private settings, there is a close association between having rules allowing smoking in the home, cars, or workplaces and actual exposure to ETS.

More than 25% of Alaskan adult non-smokers and 50% of Alaskan adolescent non-smokers are exposed to ETS on a weekly basis. The high proportion of exposed adolescents is troublesome given the evidence of a link between youth ETS exposure and subsequent initiation of smoking and smoking prevalence.²⁶ It is also somewhat surprising, given the recent drop in adolescent smoking prevalence, and may suggest a significant amount of their exposure does not come from peers but from adult smokers in their environment. To address this problem, communities may need to focus on educational outreach on the importance of home and car smoking restrictions in addition to support for clean indoor air ordinances for public places. The State's Tobacco Prevention and Control Program supports communities across Alaska in their efforts to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with smoking—efforts including enactment of clean indoor air ordinances. Currently 12 Alaskan communities have such ordinances.

Accessible, understandable, and current information on tobacco use behaviors and attitudes is an essential tool in the fight against this public health threat. The goal of this series of Bulletins is to provide that tool for health professionals, affiliated partners, and concerned Alaskans alike. A complete copy of the new report, *Tobacco in the Great Land*, can be found at

<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/pubs/tobacofeb04.pdf>.

The final Bulletin of this series will focus on tobacco use cessation.

Previous Bulletins in this series:

- Tobacco Use in Alaska
- Smokeless Tobacco Use in Alaska
- Disparities in Tobacco Use - Alaska


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- ⁷ Ibid, p.123.
- ⁸ Ibid, p.122.
- ⁹ Ibid, p.124.
- ¹⁰ Hellenenthal and Associates, Tobacco Media Awareness Survey, 2002.
- ¹¹ Peterson, p. 128.
- ¹² Hellenenthal.
- ¹³ Peterson, pp.133-134.
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- ¹⁶ Schoellhorn J, Wiens HN, Perham-Hester KA. Alaska Maternal and Child Health Data Book 2003. Anchorage, AK: Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Unit, Section of Maternal Child, and Family Health, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services, June 2003; p. 84.
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- ¹⁹ Ibid, p. 136.
- ²⁰ Ibid, p. 135.
- ²¹ Ibid, p. 121.
- ²² Ibid, p. 137.
- ²³ Ibid, p. 138.
- ²⁴ Ibid, p. 136.
- ²⁵ Ibid, p. 140.
- ²⁶ Wakefield MA, Chaloupka FJ, Kaufman NJ, Orleans CT, Barker DC, Ruel EE. Effect of restrictions on smoking at home, at school, and in public places on teenage smoking: cross sectional study. *BMJ* 2000;321:333-337.

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