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Babies exposed to cigarette toxins via invisible residue

Babies and young children are being exposed to toxic particles from cigarettes, even when no one is smoking nearby, a new study has found.

Residue from smokers' fingers and clothes has been picked up in the systems of babies, being cared for in hospital neonatal units, as part of The University of Texas study.

It questions the assumption that children and vulnerable people who are not directly exposed to cigarette smoke are safe from its health consequences.

"[Third-hand smoke] is easily transported and deposited indoors, where it persists and exposes individuals for months, creating potential health consequences in seemingly nicotine-free environments, particularly for vulnerable patients," the study says.

Toxins including nicotine have been detected in babies' urine.

Quit Victoria director Sarah White said it was shocking that cigarette particles could be picked up in such a sterile environment.

"This is purely what's been brought in on hands and clothes," she said. "A lot of parents think they're doing the right thing by not smoking in the house or in the car when the kids are around, but what is happening is that when a person has a cigarette, they're tracking those toxins around on their clothes and on their fingers."

The study was conducted with babies from a neonatal unit in a Victoria hospital. It was not known whether the babies were exposed to third-hand smoke from their parents, visitors or hospital staff.

Experts have known about third-hand smoke for about five years but it is still being researched.

Dr White said most health experts had previously thought that once cigarette smoke had disappeared, other people were not at risk.

She said smokers needed to be aware that they transported cigarette residue and particles with them and put others at risk.

Smoking is banned in Victorian hospitals and most only allow smoking outside, well away from entrances.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/victoria/babies-exposed-to-cigarettes-toxins-via-invisible-residue-20151222-glth0g.html#ixzz41pglHYYS>   
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