

Home, vehicle smoking bans can ignite decision to be smoke-free

A pair of recently published studies may provide hope for parents who fear protecting their children from smoking in the future is out of their reach.

“Enforced home and vehicle smoking bans appear to support youth in maintaining a resolve to not smoke, regardless of the smoking status of the parent,” said lead author Dr. Annette Schultz, an assistant professor in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Manitoba, and an investigator at the PsychoSocial Oncology and Cancer Nursing Research Group at St. Boniface Hospital Research.

Her study is published in the latest edition of *Chronic Diseases in Canada*. “The home environment is one social setting where parents may be able to influence their children’s susceptibility to smoking in the future.”

Lead author of the other study, Janet Nowatzki, a health outcomes analyst at CancerCare Manitoba, agrees.

“In particular, parents who are smokers and have difficulties quitting, likely worry that they are negatively influencing their children, but even if parents are having trouble quitting, imposing a smoking ban in their home is one thing they can do to help their children remain smoke-free.”

“The results of these studies certainly reinforce the importance of our upcoming ban on smoking in vehicles carrying children under 16,” said Jim Rondeau, Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors. “We knew about the impact of secondhand smoke in cars, but now we also know that a ban lessens the chances that young people will ever start smoking. I have to thank the researchers for undertaking studies that provide such practical information with the real potential to impact smoking rates.”

Prior to the teen years, youth are already forming attitudes about smoking. These attitudes are influenced by many complex factors, such as what is happening at home, and are linked to future smoking behaviour.

Schultz’s study focused on determining associations between youth’s susceptibility to smoking and parental and sibling smoking, restrictions on smoking in the home and exposure to smoking in vehicles. Schultz and colleagues discovered that for non-smokers, the odds of being susceptible to smoking increased with having a sibling who smokes, a lack of a total household smoking ban, and riding in a vehicle with a smoker.

“Youth’s attitudes towards smoking and their decisions to smoke are shaped by many factors in their environment, including peer smoking behaviours, school smoking bans, and community smoking norms. However, findings from this study suggest that a commitment to having a smoke-free household may also serve as a protective mechanism for youth,” said Schultz.

Nowatzki’s study compared the perceptions of Grade 5 to 9 students from across the country with their parents regarding household environment and attitudes about smoking. Nowatzki’s research revealed statistically significant patterns of disagreement between the youth and parent responses.

“Although it was not surprising to discover that parents and youth did not always agree on what was taking place in the household, it is important to acknowledge that there is room to improve on clearly establishing and communicating household bans, for both smoking and non-smoking parents,” said Nowatzki, adding that when parents and youth disagreed, youth perceived fewer rules and more smoking in the home, as well as exposure to smoking in vehicles contrary to what the parents indicated.

Based on the findings of these studies, CancerCare Manitoba is developing promotional materials to educate the public about the benefits of household and vehicle smoking bans.

Funded by Health Canada, the studies were published in the June 2010 edition of *Chronic Diseases in Canada*, a quarterly scientific journal focusing on current evidence relevant to the control and prevention of chronic diseases and injuries in Canada.

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