

Passive smoking as harmful as active smoking

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Smoking at public places like restaurants, coffee houses, hotels, offices, public transport, educational institutions and hospitals goes unchecked despite a complete ban on it according to the Prohibition of Smoking & Protection of Non-smokers Health Ordinance 2002.

Health experts have been particularly showing great concern on smoking in public places that exposes the non-smoker population to serious health risks of tobacco smoke. They say that all this is due to zero implementation of the Anti-smoking Ordinance 2002, encouraging smokers to boldly violate it.

Everyone has the right to breathe in smoke-free, clean environments and smokers have no right to damage the health of non-smokers because of their irresponsible and anti-social behaviour, said health experts talking to 'The News'.

Various research studies have proved the presence of specific cigarette constituents in the blood, urine and saliva of non-smokers, who share home, of-

fices, restaurants, transport, cinema halls, conference rooms and other enclosed spaces with smokers, who burn tobacco products such as cigarettes, 'bidis' and water pipes (shisha). Everyone in that environment is exposed to the harmful effects of smoking, said Head of Community Medicine at Islamabad Medical & Dental College Professor Dr. Muhammad Ashraf Chaudhry while talking to 'The News' on the subject.

Second-hand smoke is defined as breathing the tobacco smoke, exhaled by others, or the exposure of non-smokers to tobacco consumption products in the indoor environment.

Dr Ashraf said among adults, men and women, the exposure to second-hand smoke results in heart diseases, heart attacks and lung cancer. "There is a higher risk of lung cancer among non-smoking women married to smokers. In pregnant women, it causes low-birth weight babies. Children of smoking parents are at a higher risk of being hospitalised for respiratory conditions such as pneumonia, bronchitis, asthma, inner ear infections and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)," he said while respond-

ing to a query.

Second-hand smoke causes 600,000 premature deaths per year around the globe that account for one in eight tobacco-related deaths, countless crippling and disfiguring illnesses, and economic losses in tens of billions of dollars per year. There are more than 4,000 poisonous chemicals in tobacco smoke, of which at least 250 are known to be harmful and more than 50 are known to cause cancer.

Dr Ashraf said the youth exposed to second-hand smoke at home are 1.5-2 times more likely to start smoking than those not exposed. "Ten per cent of economic costs related to tobacco use are attributable to second-hand smoke," he said adding that tobacco use imposes both direct economic costs on society, such as those associated with treating tobacco-related diseases, and indirect costs associated with reduced productivity or lost wages because of death or illness.

"According to estimates made in 2009, only 5.4 per cent of the world's population is covered by comprehensive smoke-free laws while more than 94 per cent of people are unprotected. Of the

100 most populous cities, only 22 are smoke-free," said Dr Ashraf.

He believes that creating 100 per cent smoke-free environments is the only way to protect people from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke. "Second-hand smoke can spread from a smoking area to a non-smoking area, even if the doors between the two areas are closed and even if ventilation is provided. Only 100 per cent smoke-free environments provide effective protection."

Dr Ashraf like many other health experts believe that comprehensive tobacco control would help the country in reducing the rising number of heart attacks, strokes, cancers and other non-communicable diseases. "As a public health specialist, I strongly appeal to the Government of Pakistan to remove lacunas from the Anti-Smoking Ordinance 2002 and devise strategies for its effective implementation in true letter and spirit, so that violators can be dealt with strictly and the health of non-smokers from second-hand smoke can be protected in enclosed public places," he said.