



Press release

## **Second-hand smoke: a danger to the health of children**

To protect them, thank you for smoking outside!

**Montreal, September 23, 2010** – Second-hand smoke – the smoke that escapes directly into the air from a cigarette or a cigar, for example – is a danger to health, and particularly to the health of children who are more sensitive to it because they breathe faster and therefore absorb more toxic products than adults, and because their immune system is not fully developed. And second-hand smoke contains a lot of toxic products: it is made up of 4,800 chemical substances, including nicotine, ammonia and tar, sometimes even in greater concentrations than in the smoke inhaled by the smoker him or herself. Moreover, at least 60 of these substances can cause cancer.

### **Second-hand smoke: a danger to the health of children**

“Children who are regularly exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to suffer from respiratory problems such as asthma and bronchitis, but it also increases their risk of having ear infections, colds and even learning difficulties. As for babies, they run a greater risk of dying from sudden infant death syndrome,” explains Dr. Christiane Laberge, one of the spokespersons for the *Smoke-Free Family* awareness program.

Unborn babies are not protected either: by reducing the blood flow to the baby, second-hand smoke risks affecting the development of the baby’s heart, lungs, nervous system and digestive system, as well as having an adverse effect on his or her growth. In addition, exposure of pregnant women to second-hand smoke is associated with a greater risk of miscarriage or premature delivery.

Note that regular exposure to second-hand smoke causes 1,700 deaths per year in Canada, that it is an important risk factor in lung cancer, and that it contributes to significantly increasing the risks of cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease and of respiratory disorders in people of all ages.

### **Quebec children: more exposed to second-hand smoke**

In Quebec, 12% of young people between the ages of 0 and 11 are regularly exposed to second-hand smoke at home, which is double the Canadian average. Only 43% of Quebec families ban the use of tobacco at home, compared to 64% in the rest of the country. For Dr. Roxane Néron, another physician spokesperson for *Smoke-Free Family*, this situation is probably related to several factors, including the high rate of tobacco use in the province, a more tolerant attitude and a lack of information about the harmful effects. On this topic, she adds: “When we explain to parents the risk that second-hand smoke represents to the health of children, they are generally receptive and want to take concrete action to protect them. We suppose that many are simply not aware of these dangers or that they tend to underestimate them.”

## **A program to protect children from smoke**

Providing Quebecers with better information is precisely the mission of *Smoke-Free Family*, a provincial program designed to protect children from the dangers of second-hand smoke.

On the [SmokeFreeFamily.ca](http://SmokeFreeFamily.ca) website, parents will find information on second-hand smoke, especially on its harmful effects on the health of children and pregnant women, as well as tips and tools to make their living environment – home and car – smoke-free. The site also aims at setting the record straight on myths around second-hand smoke, including the popular strategies to eliminate it.

On this subject, the third spokesperson for the program, Dr. Johanne Blais, acknowledges that parents who adopt behaviors such as smoking under the kitchen hood or in the garage show a desire to not expose their children to second-hand smoke. “However, even if their intention is positive, these methods of mitigation are not very effective. People who wish to protect the health of their children only need to retain a single message, which is to smoke outside,” she concludes.

### **About *Smoke-Free Family***

*Smoke-Free Family* is an initiative of ACTI-MENU, presented in partnership with several public and private organizations, namely the Quebec ministry of Health and Social Services, Quebec’s public health departments, Health Canada, McNeil Consumer Healthcare and the Canadian Cancer Society.

### **About ACTI-MENU**

ACTI-MENU, a socially oriented organization wholly owned by hospital foundations, is the largest company exclusively dedicated to prevention and health promotion in Quebec. The initiator of well-known general public campaigns such as the *5/30 Health and Wellness Challenge*, the *Quit to Win! Challenge* and *Smoke-Free Family*, ACTI-MENU’s team of specialists also implements health promotion programs in the workplace and publishes numerous information brochures destined for patients in the public health care network. Since 1988, nearly one million Quebecers have been directly touched by an ACTI-MENU program.

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