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Smoking has Serious Health Effects on Pets, too

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By now most people are aware of the serious health dangers of smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke in humans. What you may not realize is that cigarette and cigar smoke can cause severe disease in pets, too.

The harmful cancer-causing ingredients from cigarettes can be found in high concentrations on furniture and carpeting/flooring in the homes of smokers. Studies show that dogs, whose noses are close to the ground, breathe in these toxins and are at a higher risk for developing nasal cancer and may have an increased risk for lung cancer as well. Cats are at an even higher risk of developing cancer from the smoke as they groom themselves and ingest the toxins. Studies show that cats who live in homes with smokers are 2-3 times as likely to develop cancers such as malignant lymphoma and a cancer in their mouth (squamous cell carcinoma). Both are very serious and often fatal to cats. Pet birds, too, are highly susceptible to any pollution in the air. They are more likely to develop lung cancer and other health problems when exposed to smoke.

Cancer is not the only risk for dogs and cats exposed to secondhand smoke. Asthma, coughing, and allergies are also seen in these pets. Another less common but very real danger for our pets is ingestion of cigarettes/tobacco, which can cause serious illness or even death.

The answer to reducing these risks is to quit smoking. Of course, this is difficult. Many smokers may want to join the American Cancer Society on the third Thursday in November for the Great American Smoke-out. The ACS has a number of resources on their website to help smokers kick the habit that day (and every day). While you may choose to smoke, your indoor pets have no way to escape the toxins from cigarettes. If you are unable to quit and have children or pets in the house, at least smoke outside. Don't smoke in the car with children or pets with you; rolling down the windows does very little to reduce the smoke and the toxins can still settle on the interior of the car.

If your pet is coughing or wheezing, call your veterinarian. A yearly physical exam is also essential in every pet, not just those exposed to secondhand smoke. Your veterinarian can examine your pet's mouth and lungs at that time to try to catch any health problems early. For more information on secondhand smoke and your pets, go to <https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Stop-smoking-for-your-pets-health.aspx>.

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