



WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY
31 May 2001

Second-hand smoke kills

Let's clear the air

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Second-hand tobacco smoke kills. The evidence of this is crystal clear.

Exposure to second-hand smoke causes lung cancer and heart disease in nonsmoking adults. It causes asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, and ear infections in children. Exposure of the fetus to tobacco smoke significantly increases the risk of low birth weight, spontaneous abortion, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS, or crib death).

What is not yet clear is the air that we breathe. At least one third of children in the Region are exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes. Exposure rates are as high as 70% in Argentina, 60% in Chile and Suriname, and nearly 50% in Mexico, Bolivia, and Venezuela. Many physicians smoke in hospitals and health clinics, even while treating patients. And the almost universal exposure of hospitality sector workers to high levels of second-hand smoke is of grave concern.

We routinely strive to reduce environmental threats to health in workplaces, homes, and communities. We must begin to view second-hand smoke as a key environmental threat to health.

This is why on 31 May PAHO will launch the *Smoke Free Americas* initiative. *Smoke Free Americas* is a multi-year campaign to protect the public from second-hand smoke through promotion of smoke free environments.

What does "smoke free" mean? It means the elimination of tobacco smoke from indoor environments so that everyone can breathe clean air. It *does not* mean shared ventilation systems for smoking and nonsmoking areas. Ventilation does not adequately protect nonsmokers from the harmful components of second-hand smoke.

What sectors are included in the *Smoke Free Americas* initiative? Second-hand smoke does not discriminate when it kills. The protection of public health justifies eliminating smoking indoors in all sectors, as soon as possible. The elimination of smoking from health, educational, and youth facilities should be immediately feasible. Other sectors that present obstacles may require a gradually progressive approach. Nonetheless, smoke free should be the ultimate goal of all sectors.

Countries joining the *Smoke Free Americas* initiative this year commit themselves to the following targets:

- By 2003 (at the latest): All health, educational and youth institutions will be smoke free.
- By 2006: At least half of all private workplaces, including the hospitality sector, will be smoke free. Fewer than 20% of youth will be exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes.

PAHO will support the achievement of these targets through the development of communications tools, implementation guidelines, and community advocacy projects. It will also support multisectoral collaboration, including collaboration with the tourism industry.

Achieving a *Smoke Free Americas* requires the collaborative partnership of governments, parents, schools, private institutions, and nongovernmental organizations, whose participation is needed to ensure action at all levels, across all sectors. *Smoke Free Americas* invites all of these to become leaders in establishing smoke free environments.

Let's clear the air. Demand and provide smoke free environments, starting today.