
Press statement

22 June 2010

PASSIVE SMOKING MAJOR HEALTH HAZARD TO CHILDREN- EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT EVENT DISCUSSES NEW SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

On 23 June, the European Parliament will host a policy debate around the new scientific evidence on the impact of passive smoking on children's health, released by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the **Royal College of Physicians**, a member of the **European Public Health Alliance**. The event is hosted by **Marina Yannakoudakis MEP** (UK) and **Theodoros Skylakakis MEP** (Greece) and will feature lively discussions on the findings of the report, which quantifies the extent of the problem and provides powerful evidence to support the implementation of the 2009 EU Council Recommendation and European Parliament Resolution on Smoke Free Environments.

To that effect, the audience will be debating with high-level representatives, including Alberto Infante (Ministry of Health and Social Policy, Spain), Michal Krzyzanowski (WHO), Terje Peetso (European Commission), John Britton (Chair, Tobacco Advisory Group, Royal College of Physicians), Monika Kosińska (Secretary General, European Public Health Alliance), Panagiotis Behrakis (President, European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention) and Catriona Williams (President, Eurochild).

Taking place in the European Parliament's premises in Brussels, room P5B001, from 11h45 to 14h30, the event will be preceded by a networking lunch (for further information, please contact eleanor@epha.org). A Press Conference gathering Marina Yannakoudakis MEP, Theodoros Skylakakis MEP, Monika Kosińska and John Britton will summarise the conclusions of the event and provide further information to European and national media from 15h00 to 15h30 in Anna Politkovskaya room PHS 0A50, Brussels. For further information please contact linda.cuthbertson@rcplondon.ac.uk - 0044794 105 7494 or pressoffice@epha.org - 003222303056.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.epha.org/a/4068>

Passive smoking in the home is a major hazard to the health of the millions of children who live with smokers. '**Passive smoking and children**', the major new report from the Tobacco Advisory Group of the **Royal College of Physicians** says that children are particularly vulnerable to passive smoke exposure, most of which occurs in the home.

Millions of children currently live in a household where they are exposed to cigarette smoke, and many more are exposed outside the home.

The report highlights the most important factors governing exposure to children, which are whether their parents or carers smoke, and whether smoking is allowed in the home. Relative to children in non-smoking families, passive smoke exposure is around **three times higher** if the father smokes, **over six times higher** if the mother smokes, and **nearly nine times higher** if both parents smoke. Smoking by other carers is also a significant source of passive smoke exposure. Children growing up with parents or siblings who smoke are also **90% more likely** to become smokers themselves.

In addition to the burden of disease, passive smoking also places a large financial burden on health economies due to the cost of primary care visits and asthma treatment costs, coupled with the future treatment costs of smokers who take up smoking as a consequence of exposure to smoking by parents. The report also covers the ethics of children and passive smoking, and public opinion on smoke-free policy. It makes a series of strong policy recommendations to reduce the burden of passive smoking on children, **a burden which is entirely avoidable:**

- The most effective means of protecting children from passive smoking is to reduce the prevalence of smoking in adults, and particularly parents and other carers
- So far, reductions in smoking prevalence have been much less marked in younger than older adults
- Tobacco control initiatives at population and individual level therefore need to be adapted and improved to target younger adults more effectively
- This will require a comprehensive strategy including: sustained increases in the real price of tobacco; further reduction in smuggling and illicit trade; investment in new and innovative mass media campaigns targeting smoking in younger adults; more effective health warnings; prohibition of point-of-sale display; generic standardised packaging; tailored cessation services; and a range of other policies
- Specific measures to prevent uptake of smoking, by preventing exposure of children to smoking in public and in the media; reducing the number and accessibility of tobacco retailers to children, imposing strict penalties on those who sell to children, and promoting peer-led and other school-based interventions are also needed
- It is important to promote smoke-free homes through mass media campaigns, advice and support from health professionals to smokers, and new approaches such as substituting cigarettes with medicinal nicotine
- Smoke-free legislation should be extended much more widely, to include public places frequented by children and young people, and to prohibit all smoking in cars and other vehicles; media campaigns are needed to explain the need to avoid exposing children to smoking as well as to smoke
- Governments and individuals have a duty to protect children from exposure to smoke and to smoking
- There is public support for more comprehensive tobacco control policies, and a strong ethical justification for these measures.

Professor John Britton, Chair of the RCP Tobacco Advisory Group said:

“This report isn’t just about protecting children from passive smoking, it’s about taking smoking completely out of children’s lives.”

Notes to Editors

The Royal College of Physicians of London provides a huge range of services to its 24,000 Members and Fellows and other medical professionals. These include delivering examinations, training courses, continuous professional development and conferences; undertaking clinical audits; publishing newsletters, guidelines and books through to maintaining the College's historical collections. We also lead medical debate, and lobby and advise government and other decision-makers on behalf of our members.

The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) is the European Platform bringing together public health organisations representing health professionals, patients groups, health promotion and disease specific NGOs, academic groupings and other health associations.
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