

Dangers of second-hand smoke

Cancer society president explains importance of ban and praises MBPJ's plan

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CANCER Advocacy Society of Malaysia (Empowered) founder and president Dr Christina Ng, who is also a consultant oncologist, is full of praise for the Petaling Jaya City Council's (MBPJ) plan to have a smoke-free environment in Taman Jaya.

In a question-and-answer session, Dr Ng points out why it is important to have a smoking ban in place.

What is second-hand smoke (SHS)?

SHS is also known as environmental tobacco smoke that is a mix of side-stream and mainstream smoke.

Side-stream smoke is smoke from a lit cigarette while mainstream smoke is the smoke

Exposure to SHS can cause childhood leukaemia, cancer of the voice box, throat, brain... and breast.

— DR CHRISTINA NG



exhaled.

Side-stream smoke has higher concentrations of cancer-causing agents than mainstream smoke. It has smaller particles than mainstream smoke, and is able to find its way into the lungs and body cells easily.

When non-smokers are exposed to SHS, this is termed passive smoking.

Non-smokers who breathe in SHS take in nicotine and toxic chemicals via the same route that smokers do.

How does SHS harm your health?

Tobacco smoke contains more than 7,000 chemical compounds. At least 69 are known to cause cancer. SHS is classified as a cancer-causing agent by the United States (US) Environmental Protection Agency, the US surgeon-general and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a branch of the World Health Organisation.

SHS has been linked to lung cancer. Extensive research on passive smoking and lung cancer was published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1997 and based on scientific evi-

dence, there is a clear global consensus that passive smoking does cause lung cancer.

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How does SHS harm children?

Children exposed to SHS are at increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome, ear infections, colds, pneumonia, bronchitis and severe asthma.

Exposure to SHS irritates the airways and has immediate harmful effects on a person's heart and blood vessels. It may increase the risk of heart disease by an estimated 25% to 30%. Exposure to SHS slows the growth of a child's lungs and causes him to cough, wheeze and feel breathless.

How can I prevent exposure

to SHS?

There is only one approach – eliminate all smoking indoors or outdoors. Separating smokers from non-smokers, cleaning the air and ventilating buildings cannot keep non-smokers from being exposed to SHS.

There are no safe levels of SHS. Tobacco smoke can move through air ducts, wall and floor cracks, elevator shafts and along crawl spaces to contaminate apartments on other floors, even those that are far from the smoke.

Does Empowered support MBPJ in this initiative to ban smoking at the council's park?

Yes. It will give MBPJ's Health Department and Empowered a window of opportunity to create awareness on the effects of SHS and it can help people kick the smoking habit.