

Study shows second-hand smoke carcinogens absorbed immediately

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

A new study shows that nonsmokers can absorb a major cancer-causing chemical from secondhand smoke, underscoring the important protection Oregon's new Smokefree Workplace law will bring to bar and restaurant workers.

The research, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, was conducted by Oregon public health researchers and appears in the August edition of the American Journal of Public Health published today.

It found that nonsmoking employees who were exposed to tobacco smoke in the workplace had elevated levels of NNK, a tobacco-specific carcinogen in their bodies. NNK is not considered safe at any level, and is found in the body only as a result of using tobacco or breathing secondhand smoke.

The study also found that every hour of exposure to tobacco smoke leads to a six percent increase in carcinogen levels.

This Tuesday, Governor Ted Kulongoski signed Oregon's new law, which expands the 2001 smokefree workplace law to include bars, taverns, bingo halls and bowling alleys. Twenty-three other states already have passed similar laws.

"This study provides further proof that secondhand smoke is a health risk to anyone who breathes it," said Susan Allan, M.D., state public health officer in the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division. "With the new Smokefree Workplace law in effect, Oregon is making great strides toward improving the health of all workers."

Researchers followed 52 nonsmoking employees of bars and restaurants in Oregon, where smoking is still permitted and compared them to 32 nonsmoking bar and restaurant employees who work in bars and restaurants where smoking is banned. Urine samples were collected from people in both groups before and after their work shifts and tested for NNK.

Three of four employees who worked in businesses that allowed smoking had detectable levels of NNK, compared to fewer than half of unexposed workers. The study also found the amount of NNK went up in direct relationship to the number of hours worked, six percent an hour on average, which shows the levels reported are an accurate reflection of workplace exposure, according to Michael Stark, Ph.D., the study's lead author.

Stark is employed by Multnomah County Health Department and his team of researchers is from Multnomah County and the DHS Public Health Division.

Tobacco prevention and education is one of many public health programs within DHS that focus on prevention and helping people manage their health so they can be as productive and healthy as possible. More information about the program's efforts to reduce tobacco-related illness and death is on the Web at www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/tobacco/index.shtml.

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