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Acting Surgeon General joins with American Academy of Pediatrics to protect children from secondhand smoke

Other federal agencies also move to protect hundreds of thousands of Head Start children from exposure

Acting Surgeon General Kenneth Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H., today joined with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to call on pediatricians to help parents eliminate children's exposure to secondhand smoke and provide information to help parents quit smoking.

This partnership will provide doctors with the tools and resources they need to better protect their patients from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF) also joined in today's efforts by highlighting their joint initiative to reduce children's exposure to secondhand smoke among hundreds of thousands of children who participate in Head Start, a national program administered by ACF.

The announcements, made at the Edward C. Mazique Parent Child Center in Washington, D.C., included the release of *Children and Secondhand Smoke Exposure*, an excerpt from the 2006 Surgeon General's Report on *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*. The excerpt summarizes key scientific evidence on the serious health risks that secondhand smoke poses to children and serves as the anchor for intensified action on the issue.

"We have achieved great progress in dramatically reducing adult nonsmokers' exposure to secondhand smoke," said Dr. Moritsugu. "But, sadly, children continue to be more heavily exposed to secondhand smoke and are especially vulnerable to its effects because their respiratory, immune, and nervous systems are still developing. Children are powerless to protect themselves from this risk, but we are not. We must act now to safeguard them."

Although secondhand smoke exposure among children has declined over the past 15 years, children remain more heavily exposed to secondhand smoke than nonsmoking adults. Children are exposed to this hazard in the places where they spend most of their time, including homes, vehicles, child care centers, restaurants, and other public places.

"There is no safe way to smoke around children," said AAP President Jay E. Berkelhamer, MD. "As pediatricians, we can help eliminate children's exposure to tobacco smoke by helping parents quit and by encouraging strict no-smoking rules in all places where children spend time. If a parent is too dependent on nicotine to quit immediately, the AAP urges parents to adopt strict no smoking policies everywhere a child might be exposed – at home and school, at sitters and daycares, and in cars at all times while parents advance toward quitting."

The joint national initiative between EPA and ACF will leverage EPA's expertise in protecting children from secondhand smoke. It will capitalize on ACF's access to low-income children and children from racial and ethnic groups who are disproportionately exposed to secondhand smoke.

The Surgeon General also unveiled *Sabemos* (Spanish for "we know"), a bilingual, culturally appropriate toolkit developed by the HHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support efforts by Hispanic parents and community leaders to protect children from secondhand smoke.

"The joint efforts we are announcing today are just the beginning," Dr. Moritsugu said. "Together, we must continue to enlist parents, friends, family, healthcare providers, teachers, caregivers, and public health and community organizations to engage in collaborative initiatives to protect our nation's children from this completely preventable health hazard."

Copies of *Children and Secondhand Smoke Exposure—Excerpts from The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General* and related materials are available on the Surgeon General's Web site at www.surgeongeneral.gov. To learn more about the *Sabemos* toolkit, contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-CDC-INFO or tobaccoinfo@cdc.gov. Pediatricians can access resources on secondhand smoke prevention to use in their practices by visiting www.aap.org/RichmondCenter.

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