



OTAGO AND SOUTHLAND DIVISION INC.

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Opinion Piece

Let's Look After Little Lungs

If you are around children and young people and you smoke, how about a New Year's Resolution to keep second hand smoke away from them? It's poisonous and bad for their health. Significant numbers of kiwi kids under the age of 18 are exposed to second hand smoke in homes and vehicles every day. Children are particularly vulnerable to second hand smoke due to their smaller lungs, higher respiratory rates and immature immune systems. There is no safe level of second hand smoke and it is estimated that in New Zealand around 325 people die each year as a result of exposure to it.

One thing that we could do is ban smoking in cars when passengers under the age of 18 are in them. A recent survey in Otago and Southland has shown very strong support for cars to be Smokefree when children and young people are in them. This support is really encouraging. The survey was completed by 1435 people in Otago and Southland, with 95% (1373) of respondents supporting a ban on smoking in cars carrying people under the age of 18. Nearly 4 out of 5 people 79% (1139) supported a total ban on smoking in cars, further strong support for Smokefree cars. The survey was carried out over the past year in shopping outlets, educational and recreational facilities and at community events. Members of Smokefree Coalitions based in Invercargill, Central Otago and Dunedin assisted by their volunteers carried it out. Those members were Awarua Whānau Services, the Cancer Society, Heart Foundation, Public Health South and WellSouth. All these organisations are working towards the government goal of a Smokefree NZ by 2025. This goal means that 95% of the population will be Smokefree.

Why support Smokefree cars?

Smoking around children and young people exposes them to second hand smoke which contains very harmful toxins. Second hand smoke is highly concentrated in the confined space of a car even when windows are open. There is strong evidence that children who breathe in second hand smoke are more likely to develop chest infections, glue ear and asthma. Exposure to second hand smoke also increases the risk of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI). There is no risk-free level of second hand smoke exposure; even brief exposure can be harmful to health.

We know that young people who have friends/family/whānau who smoke, and who are exposed to second hand smoke are more likely to become smokers, a habit that results in 5000 avoidable deaths per year.

Smoking in cars with children in them has been banned in Australia, France, England, Wales, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Cyprus, Mauritius, Puerto Rico, most of Canada, and parts of the US. Italy is introducing a ban on smoking in cars when children or pregnant women are in them. This comes into effect at the end of 2015. Smokefree cars are being considered in Finland, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Taiwan. New Zealand is clearly falling behind other countries.

If smoking in vehicles is reduced it will result in less smoking-related illness and death. We need public policy that protects and enhances the health of our children/tamariki and young people /rangatahi.

In 2016 Members of Parliament need to consider strengthening Smokefree legislation to include Smokefree cars for children and young people.

We want a future for our children with less cancer, heart and respiratory disease.

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