

Lancashire smokers urged to 'Take 7 Steps Out' to protect North West children

A new drive to prevent cigarette smoke from triggering asthma attacks, hearing impairments and cot deaths will launch in Lancashire on the 12th of August.

This toll of illness, caused by secondhand smoke, is the focus of a new North West campaign that will urge parents to Take 7 Steps Out of their homes to help protect their children from immediate and lifelong damage to their lives and health.

The need for the campaign to protect children of all ages is highlighted by survey results released today by Smokefree North West which reveal that:

- almost half of parents do not know that secondhand smoke can cause cot deaths (47 percent)
- more than a third do not know that it can cause ear infections and hearing impairments (35 percent)
- 86 percent of respondents agreed that smokers should be encouraged not to smoke in their home if they share it with a child
- more than half of the respondents do not know that secondhand smoke has an impact on children attending school (51 percent)

Dr Chris Clayton, a Lancashire GP based at Darwen Health Centre said: "Smoking around children is responsible for at least 35,000 preventable GP and hospital visits across the North West every year.* In enclosed spaces it exposes their vulnerable lungs and bodies to terrible toxins, increasing the risk of cot death, triggering asthma symptoms and ear problems which could cause hearing loss, time off school and possibly operations"

Smokefree North West is taking the '**Take 7 Steps Out**' campaign to communities across Lancashire and the North West as part of a summer roadshow, which will be launched at St John's Church, Cedar Square, Blackpool one of twenty four roadshow events which will tour every county, travelling to five locations in Lancashire.

Helen Denton, Executive Director for Children and Young People, Lancashire County Council said: "Parents in the North West clearly want the best for their children but unfortunately many are unaware of how much secondhand smoke affects their child's health. There is no doubt that cigarette smoke harms children but most parents think that moving to another part of the room, opening a window in a car or house, or smoking just outside the door will prevent harm. It won't, but just a small change such as to take 7 steps out of your home or not to smoke at all in the car, can make all the difference. This campaign aims to arm parents and carers with important information to help them make a good decision about their child's well being. There is nothing more important than ensuring our children grow up safe and well and able to take part and enjoy all that life has to offer them"

Julie Mellor is married to a local milkman and both are smokers. They live with their twelve year old daughter and two year old son in Rossendale Valley, Lancashire.

Whilst pregnant with her youngest child she gave up smoking having become aware of the risks to her unborn baby. When the baby was born she began smoking again but still aware of the dangers of secondhand smoke and the effects on the baby, she refused to smoke in the same room as him.

Julie signed up their home to the Smoke Free Homes scheme while attending a fun day at The Maden Community and Children's Centre in Bacup.

Julie said: "I would do anything to protect the health of my children; I'm just sorry I started smoking again after my son was born. I know at the moment the children are not 100 percent safe from exposure to secondhand smoke as I have learnt dangerous particles can stay on your clothes for two to three hours. We have taken steps towards keeping our children safe and helping us to achieve our goal."

Dr Janet Atherton, Chair of Smokefree North West, said: "We have a duty to support parents with the best possible information. Parents and other family members may not know, for example, that many of the harmful chemicals in cigarette smoke are invisible, so standing by an open window or door is simply not enough to protect their children.

"We know the public are behind us – with almost nine in ten supporting more education for smokers who live with children. We are working in close partnership with partners across health, local authority and fire and rescue and believe this campaign can make a real difference to the lives of children across our region. You can log on at Take7 Steps Out for helpful tips and hints about how to make your home smokefree"

The Take 7 Steps Out roadshow will tour the North West from 10th August until 11th September and is supported by a five-week TV campaign organised jointly with Fresh – Smokefree North East.

For more information on locations of activities visit take7stepsout.co.uk and get instant updates from campaign mascot StepaRoo by following her blog at steparoo.take7stepsout.co.uk

Ends

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Interview/photo opportunities:

- Dr Janet Atherton, Chair Smokefree North West
- Helen Denton, Executive Director for Children and Young People, Lancashire County Council
- Dr Frank Atherton, Director of Public Health, NHS North Lancashire; Smokefree North West board member; President, Association of Directors of Public Health.
- Dr Chris Clayton, GP Darwen Health Care Centre
- Fay Watson, Programme Manager, Tobacco Control Cumbria and Lancashire Public Health Networks
- Case study: Julie Mellor is married to a local milkman and both are smokers. They live with their twelve year old daughter and two year old son in Rossendale Valley, Lancashire.

Visual opportunities:

- Campaign mascot StepaRoo and her joey engaging with the crowd
- StepaRoo using the giant '**Take 7 Steps Out**' musical steps along with local children
- Video of case study and TV commercial

Lancashire roadshow locations:

- St John's Church, Cedar Square, Blackpool, 12 August , 10am to 4pm
- St James Street, Burnley, 18 August, 9am to 3pm
- The Mall, Blackburn, 24 August , 8am – 5.30
- Arndale Shopping Centre, Morecable, 25 August, 9.30 to 4pm
- St Georges Centre, Preston, 28 August, 9 am to 5pm

Notes to editors:

*Secondhand smoke results in at least 35,000 GP consultations a year in the NW and over 1,000 hospital admissions. (Based on the Royal College of Physicians: Passive smoking and children. A report by the Tobacco Advisory Group. London: RCP, March 2010)

Exposure to secondhand smoke increases risk of lower respiratory illnesses such as bronchitis, sudden infant death syndrome (cot death), wheeze and middle ear disease. It is also linked to problematic lung functioning and asthma.

Further evidence shows that those exposed to secondhand smoke are 25 percent more likely to develop cancer or coronary heart disease later in life and children who grow up with parents that smoke are three times more likely to become smokers themselves.

A national report conducted by the Royal College of Physicians estimates secondhand smoke causes:

- 20,500 new cases of lower respiratory tract infection in children under 3 year-old (national figure)
- 121,400 new cases of middle ear infections in children of all ages (national figure)
- 22,600 new cases of wheeze and asthma in children each year (national figure)
- At least 200 new cases of bacterial meningitis each year; and comments "the entire excess disease burden is avoidable" (national figure)

Smokefree North West is a region-wide partnership supported by all 24 PCTs that aims to reduce smoking-related health inequalities across the region. It is committed to breaking the cycle of children and young people's exposure and addiction to tobacco.

Smoking remains the single biggest preventable cause of early death, killing 35 people a day – 13,000 a year - in the North West alone. This is more than deaths than from alcohol, drugs, obesity, illegal drugs and road accidents combined.

Adult smoking rates in the NW are above the national average at 23 percent and rates of smoking among young adults and children also remain high, with 47 percent of 18-24 year-olds smoking (SMRS report July 2010) and 36 percent of 17 year-olds smoking (TSNW Report 2009).

For more information, visit www.smokefreenorthwest.org