

# Cigarettes can hurt non-smokers, too

By Shirley Ludvick

Chukchi News and Information Service

ILLIAMNA — I started smoking cigarettes in high school after curiosity had caught my attention as to why my classmates were smoking.

## OPINION

At that time, it didn't occur to me that smoking was a health hazard not only to me, but to those around me. Today I realize that cigarette smoking hurts non-smokers as well as smokers and that tobacco is a dangerous drug.

For example, in addition to tar and nicotine, tobacco smoke also contains many harmful gases such as carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide, which are also found in automobile fumes. More poisonous substances include arsenic trioxide, nickel carbonyl, acrolein and radioactive chemicals.

Smoking is unhealthy and causes many diseases. Emphysema, which smoking often causes, leaves its victims gasping for air. As we all know, air is precious to our lungs. We have a vacuum cleaner in our body called the cilia, which filters out germs, mucus and dirt from our lungs to avoid infections.

According to *No More Butts* by Richard W. Olshavsky, there is usually no way of knowing if a person has lung cancer until it is too late. The symptoms are chronic coughing, blood-streaked sputum, chest pains and shortness of breath.

This cancer is impossible to treat

because the lung tissue cannot repair itself. The damaged blood vessels going to the heart and brain do not cleanse themselves, so lung cancer results in premature death, though it can be detected early with routine examinations or chest x-ray.

According to literature published by the American Lung Association, studies show that smoking during pregnancy increases the chance of premature birth, miscarriage and sudden infant death syndrome. It also can destroy the body's circulatory system.

When a mother-to-be smokes, she harms the baby by inhaling harmful gases, which go through her and into the fetus' blood vessels and also block off oxygen and food going to the womb.

When I recently read other information from the American Lung Association on tobacco, I found myself horrified with what second-hand smoke can do both to children and to adult non-smokers. This is another effect of tobacco use.

Every time anyone lights a cigarette in a building, two sources of smoke enter the air. "Mainstream" smoke, the first kind, is what smokers bring into their lungs and then exhale. "Sidestream" smoke, the second kind, is the smoke that directly leaves the cigarette from the burning end.

That should tell us never to smoke around non-smokers and especially children because they breathe more rapidly than adults.

"Non-smokers have the right to breathe clean air, free from harmful and irritating tobacco smoke," says the American Lung Association.

According to the state Epidemiology

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*'Non-smokers have as much right to clean air and wholesome air as smokers have their so-called right to smoke.'*

—U.S. Surgeon General

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Bulletin, Alaska has one of the highest rates of lung cancer in the nation due to cigarette smoking.

"In 1985, there were estimated to be 261 smoking attributable deaths in Alaska over age 20," the bulletin said.

The U.S. surgeon general has said, "Non-smokers have as much right to clean air and wholesome air as smokers have their so-called right to smoke."

As we look around us each day, rules are changing for smokers. For instance, smoking recently was banned from virtually all domestic air flights by the U.S. Congress. In Alaska, there are only certain places to smoke in airports, restaurants and hotels. There is absolutely no smoking in most hospitals today. Why? Because the country is learning rapidly how dangerous this drug is to society.

Although I believe smokers have rights, non-smokers have rights, too, and they have succeeded in asserting them in recent years.

In today's world, more and more Americans are aware of the hazards of cigarettes. It is harmful to the body as well as annoying to others who do not smoke.

*Alaska Native Shirley Ludvick wrote this piece in a writing class she took via audioconference from Chukchi College, a branch campus in Kotzebue of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She grew up in Newhulen and lives in Iliamna with her husband and two children and plans to become a certified teacher. Chukchi News and Information Service is a writing project of Chukchi College.*