



National Fact Sheet

Surrounding Our Kids with Clean Air

The built environment affects every aspect of children's lives, including the air they breathe. Increased use of cars leads to elevated levels of air pollution in many communities. Exposure to secondhand smoke and other airborne toxins causes respiratory illness in kids. Designing communities that help our kids breathe easier is vital to improving their long-term health.

Transportation and Air Pollution

- When more people use cars to get around, motor vehicle emissions increase, which impacts air quality. In 2003, more than 60 percent of children under the age of 17 lived in counties that didn't meet national air quality standards.¹
- Increasing the use of public transportation can dramatically improve air quality. Compared with private cars, public transportation produces 95 percent less carbon monoxide, 92 percent fewer volatile organic compounds, and 45 percent less carbon dioxide per passenger mile.²
- During the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, the city's plan to reduce automobile congestion through widespread use of public transportation resulted in a 22 percent decline in traffic counts, a 28 percent decline in daily ozone concentrations, and a 41 percent decrease in asthma acute-care events.³

Secondhand Smoke

- Children exposed to tobacco smoke in their environment have a 50 to 100 percent greater risk of developing acute respiratory illness.⁴
- Secondhand smoke is responsible for as many as 300,000 lower respiratory tract infections in babies younger than 18 months old each year.⁵
- Nearly three out of every five children between the ages of 4 and 11 are exposed to second-hand smoke.⁶

Airborne Toxins and Asthma

- Nearly one in every 10 kids has asthma,⁷ the most common chronic childhood disease.⁸
- Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism among children due to chronic illness, and results in more than 14 million missed school days each year.⁹
- The number of children with asthma has doubled since 1980¹⁰ and the number of children dying from asthma has tripled.¹¹

1 "America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005," Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2005, <http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/index.asp>.

2 "Responding to Critics Toolkit," Center for Transportation Excellence, <http://www.cte.org/critics/te.asp>.

3 "The Built Environment and Children's Health," Susan Kay Commins and Richard Joseph Jackson, Centers for Disease Control.

4 "The Dirty Dozen: Twelve Myths that Undermine Tobacco Control," Thomas R. Frieden and Drew E. Blakeman, *American Journal of Public Health*, September 2005.

5 "Indoor Air Quality Reference Guide," Environmental Protection Agency, www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/tfs/guidef.html.

6 "America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005," Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2005, <http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/index.asp>.

7 "America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005," Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2005, <http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/index.asp>.

8 "The Built Environment and Children's Health," Susan Kay Commins and Richard Joseph Jackson, Centers for Disease Control.

9 "Indoor Air Quality Reference Guide," Environmental Protection Agency, www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/tfs/guidef.html.

10 "America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005," Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2005, <http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/index.asp>.

11 "Asthma's Impact on Children and Adolescents," Centers for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/children.htm>.