

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Involuntary Secondhand Smoke Exposure High in Multiunit Housing

Coldwater, MI. Americans living in multiunit housing, such as apartments, condominiums, duplexes or townhouses, are more likely to use tobacco products and less likely to have smoke-free home rules than people living in single-family housing.

In a first of its kind national study, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) researchers also found that about 34 percent of multiunit housing residents who have adopted voluntary smoke-free home rules have recently been exposed to secondhand smoke that entered their home from nearby living units or shared areas. According to the 2013-14 National Adult Tobacco Survey, 25 percent of adults, ages 18 years and older, who lived in multiunit housing used a tobacco product, including cigars and cigarettes. Products like these, which are burned and inhaled, are a source for secondhand smoke exposure to those around them.

Rebecca Burns, Health Officer for the tri-county health department stated “We know that in Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph counties there are about 7,400 multi-dwelling units - places where two or more families live in a single building or a complex. This represents about 11% of the counties’ housing units. It’s unfortunate to learn that those who have chosen a smoke-free lifestyle continue to be exposed to second-hand smoke while in their home.” She adds “These findings show the need to protect all people who live in multiunit housing through the adoption of smoke-free building policies and improved access to tobacco cessation resources.”

Disparities in tobacco use were also observed across population groups among those living in multiunit housing. Use of any tobacco product was highest among men, adults ages 45-64, non-Hispanic blacks, unmarried adults, lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults, people living in the Midwest, people with a high school diploma but no college education, and persons with annual household incomes less than \$20,000.

“The Surgeon General has concluded there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Opening windows or using ventilation systems does not effectively eliminate secondhand smoke exposure in multiunit housing,” Burns states. “Exposure to secondhand smoke from cigarettes causes more than 41,000 deaths nationwide among nonsmoking adults each year and about \$5.6 billion annually in lost productivity caused by premature death.”

Since 2009, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has encouraged public housing authorities to implement smoke-free policies on their properties. In 2010, HUD issued similar guidance to owners and managers of multi-family housing rental assistance programs, such as Section 8. On November 12, 2015, HUD proposed a policy for U.S. public housing that, if implemented as proposed, would prohibit the use of “lit” tobacco products (cigarettes, cigars, or pipes) in all living units, indoor common areas, administrative offices, and all outdoor areas within 25 feet of housing and administrative office buildings. As of October 2015, several hundred public housing authorities across the U.S. had already instituted such policies.

To learn more about the dangers of tobacco use and locally available cessation resources, visit our website at www.bhsj.org or like us at Facebook at www.facebook.com/bhsjwic.

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