

Owners' smoking puts pets in danger



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CONSUMER WATCH

After decades of research, it would be difficult to argue with the notion that cigarette smoking can damage your health. Physicians and health advocates have warned smoking can cause a variety of long- and short-term health consequences, many of which are deadly. Constant efforts over the past five decades have helped reduce cigarette smoking dramatically; the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates cigarette usage among adults has declined from around

43 percent in 1965 to less than 17 percent in 2014.

While that's good news, a lot of Americans still smoke, and even though the dangers of even "secondhand" smoke are well-documented, it turns out that even "thirdhand" smoke (when the chemicals from cigarette smoke linger on clothes, hair or skin) can have adverse effects on people who live or work with smokers.

But until recently, little research has been devoted to studying how smoking can also affect our pets. But from the research that has been done, it appears that smoking can affect not only humans but the animals we love as well. This week, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warned that pets often have to pay the price for living with a smoker. Tobacco smoke and its residue



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Second- and third-hand smoke can cause health problems for pets, research shows. E-cigarettes also have posed a danger.

have been shown to affect a variety of pets, including cats, dogs, guinea pigs, hamsters and even fish, afflicting them

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with cancer and other diseases.

“Smoking’s not only harmful to people; it’s harmful to pets, too,” says Dr. Carmela Stampfer, a veterinarian with the FDA. “If 58 million non-smoking adults and children are exposed to tobacco smoke, imagine

how many pets are exposed at the same time.”

While our beloved pets often share our living spaces, Stamper notes cats and dogs are likely to spend a lot of time on the floor, where many of the particles in tobacco smoke eventually settle. Often, these compounds are sticky and adhere to every space in the home. Pets breathe it in, and it sticks to their fur, where they can ingest it by licking

and sniffing. Even smokers who are careful to smoke outside the house can bring in nicotine and other dangerous chemicals on their clothes. This “thirdhand” smoke can also be poisoning your pets.

The FDA advisory also noted a few interesting facts about pets and smoking, revealed by the available research. For example, it appears that the length of a dog’s nose can affect whether it gets

sick — and from what. The nose acts as an air filter, trapping particles. In studies in which dogs were exposed to chemicals in tobacco smoke, longer-nosed breeds (such as Greyhounds and Dobermans) were found to have a doubled risk of nose cancer as compared with short-nosed breeds such as Pugs and Bulldogs. But those shorter-nosed dogs had increased risk for lung cancer, as their noses were less efficient in keeping the toxic brew of chemicals from reaching the lungs.

Cats living with smokers are at risk, too. Fe-

lines (as any cat owner knows) are constantly grooming themselves. Cats in smoking households were found to have higher risks of a mouth cancer called squamous cell carcinoma around the base of the tongue, where particles collect during grooming.

And other animals can be harmed as well. Birds developed respiratory problems, and “pocket pets” like guinea pigs were found to be at risk of a variety of health problems, including emphysema. Even fish can suffer from particles that settle out from the

air. In one experiment cited by the FDA, scientists put one smoked cigarette butt into water containing 2-week-old fathead minnows. Half of the fish died within four days.

And if you think pets can’t be harmed by electronic cigarettes, e-pens, hookahs or other systems touted as safe, think again. Poison control centers around the nation have noted an uptick in pet illnesses and deaths after they bit into the nicotine capsules in electronic cigarettes.

There’s a lot more in the FDA warning, but the message is clear: tobacco smoke has far-reaching health effects on all the creatures in a home, whether human or not.

If you’re interested in quitting smoking, there are a lot of great resources to help. For example, the American Lung Association has tools available at <http://bit.ly/2hfqNWf>, and the American Cancer Society’s resources can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/1ltRoxc>.

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