

LETTERS

SMOKING IN CARS WITH CHILDREN

Respiratory health professionals call on MPs to vote to ban smoking in cars with children

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Secondhand exposure to tobacco smoke is a major cause of ill health in children.^{1 2} Smoke inhalation damages the developing lung, and the Royal College of Physicians estimates that each year in the UK it is responsible for 300 000 primary care contacts, 9500 hospital admissions, at least 200 cases of bacterial meningitis, and 40 sudden infant deaths.¹ Most of this additional burden of disease falls on the more disadvantaged children in society,³ and all of it is avoidable. There is a strong consensus that children need to be protected from unnecessary hazards, that exposing children to tobacco smoke is unacceptable, and that removing this exposure is effective.²

Children in cars where a person is smoking are forced to inhale high amounts of tobacco smoke.⁴ As health professionals working to improve respiratory health, we welcome the amendment to the Children and Families Bill 2013 that allows the government to introduce legislation to ban smoking in cars where children are present.⁵

Objections that this legislation impinges on freedom assume that there is a right to force children to breathe tobacco smoke and the objectors seem to value this more highly than the children's right to breathe clean air. There are precedents for legislation to determine behaviour while driving, most obviously laws requiring the wearing of seatbelts and the use of child car

seats,⁶ as well as the ban on mobile phone use while driving. Smoking in cars where children are present has been banned in other countries.

We urge MPs to support this important public health measure, which will protect the wellbeing of children now and in the future.

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Full list of signatories at: www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g1284/rr/685269.

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