

I smoke frequently inside my home and have a cat and a dog. Does my smoking habit have any negative effects on my pets?

This is a great question and one that is being researched actively. Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is another term for second hand smoke. Pets in the home are often times exposed to more ETS than their human counterparts because people spend longer excursions outside of the home compared to pets. Both cats and dogs have been shown to develop cancers that we believe may be a result of ETS.

Dogs that are exposed to passive tobacco smoke have been shown to have an increased risk of developing cancers of the respiratory tract, particularly the lung and nasal cavity. One study found there was some association between exposures to tobacco in the home but this association did not change based on the amount of smoke exposure. The risk was higher for dogs with shorter noses like Boxers and Pugs. A contradicting study found that dogs with longer noses had an increased risk of developing nasal cancers when exposed to ETS than dogs with shorter noses. Based on these studies, it is clear that more research is needed to help determine which dogs are at most risk.

Cats are susceptible to developing 2 cancers. Squamous cell carcinoma is a very aggressive cancer of the mouth that occurs in cats and people. Recent studies have developed stronger links between tobacco products and the cancer. Cats groom their fur extensively and as a result their gastrointestinal tract, including the mouth, are exposed to particulate matter that falls on the fur. These particles can include the chemicals present with cigarette smoke. One study found that cats that are exposed to environmental tobacco smoke for a period greater than 5 years and cats living with 2 or more smokers were 1.6 and 2.0 times as likely to develop this oral cancer. Lymphoma in cats has also been linked to ETS recently. Risk for lymphoma increased with the duration and quantity of exposure to tobacco smoke. The longer a cat was exposed to ETS, the greater the risk of developing lymphoma was.

The studies that are being done to link smoking in the home to cancers in pets is still in the early stages and being investigated. In the mean time, it is best to assume that any smoke exposure to your pets could lead to a cancer in the future. If possible, it would be recommended to smoke in areas where your pets are not exposed to the smoke at all.