



## Union County Health Department

1224 W. Roosevelt Blvd., Monroe, NC 28110 Phone (704) 296-4800 Fax (704) 296-4807

### News Release

## **New study shows secondhand smoke increases N.C. medical costs**

**April 13, 2011, Monroe, NC** – A newly-published study shows exposure to secondhand smoke is an expensive proposition in North Carolina, generating \$293 million per year in health care costs alone. An estimated 1,690 adult nonsmokers die annually in North Carolina as a direct result of exposure to secondhand smoke.

The study, which appears in the January-February 2011 issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*, uses evidence provided by the 2006 U.S. Surgeon General's Report on the relationship between secondhand smoke exposure and a wide variety of medical conditions, including low birth weight, heart disease, stroke, asthma, and several types of cancer.

North Carolina's highly successful smoke-free restaurants and bars law, which went into effect in January 2010, may have reduced these costs. It has reduced worker exposure to secondhand smoke on- the- job by 42 percent, from 14.6 in 2008 to 8.4 percent during the first three quarters of 2010.

Union County has seen successful implementation of the law, with only eight complaints reported in all of 2010, and none resulted in fines.

“The smoke-free restaurants and bars law has quickly resulted in improved air quality and better health in Union County,” said Phillip Tarte, director of the Union County Health Department. “The more places that become smoke-free, the more we can lower medical costs and improve the health of our residents.”

The study examines health care costs using population information from 2006, but translating the costs into 2009 dollars. According to the study, the majority of the individuals affected by secondhand smoke in North Carolina are children, but treatment for heart disease represents the greatest financial cost, accounting for almost half of all health care costs caused by secondhand smoke. The second most costly item was treatment for low birth weight infants, which represented nearly one-quarter of all costs.

According to the authors, smoke-free regulations are shown to reduce short-term health care costs for heart attack treatment, and may reduce costs similarly for asthma and ear infections in children.



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“This study is another validation that secondhand smoke is harmful to everyone,” said Tarte. “We need to do all we can to protect our community - children, mothers-to-be, elders and workers from the hazards of secondhand smoke.”

You can read the article at <http://riversdeveloper.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/72101-online-first.pdf>.

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