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## **PASSIVE SMOKING DOES CAUSE LUNG CANCER. DO NOT LET THEM FOOL YOU**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been publicly accused of suppressing information. Its opponents say that WHO has withheld from publication its own report that was aimed at but supposedly failed to scientifically prove that there is an association between passive smoking, or environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), and a number of diseases, lung cancer in particular. *Both statements are untrue.*

The study in question is a case-control study on the effects of ETS on lung cancer risk in European populations, which has been carried out over the last seven years by 12 research centres in 7 European countries under the leadership of WHO's cancer research branch – the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

The results of this study, which have been completely misrepresented in recent news reports, are very much in line with the results of similar studies both in Europe and elsewhere: *passive smoking causes lung cancer in non-smokers.*

The study found that there was an estimated 16% increased risk of lung cancer among non-smoking spouses of smokers. For workplace exposure the estimated increase in risk was 17%. However, due to small sample size, neither increased risk was statistically significant. Although, the study points towards a decreasing risk after cessation of exposure.

In February 1998, according to usual scientific practice, a paper reporting the main study results was sent to a reputable scientific journal for consideration and peer review. That is why the full report is not yet publicly available. Under the circumstances, however, the authors of the study have agreed to make an abstract of the report available to the media.

"It is extremely important to note that the results of this study are consistent with the results of major scientific reviews of this question published during 1997 by the government of Australia, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the State of California", said Neil Collishaw, Acting Chief of WHO's Tobacco or Health Unit in Geneva. "A major meta-analysis of passive smoking and lung cancer was also published in the British Medical Journal in 1997. From these and other previous reviews of the scientific evidence emerges a clear global scientific consensus — passive smoking does cause lung cancer and other diseases", he concluded.

"IARC is proud of the careful scientific work done by the European scientific team responsible for this study", commented Dr Paul Kleihues, the Agency's director. "We are very concerned about the false and misleading statements recently published in the mass media. It is no coincidence that this misinformation originally appeared in the British press just before the No-Tobacco Day in the United Kingdom and the scheduled publication of the report of the British Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health".

Further information on the health effects of passive smoking is available in WHO's Advisory Kit for World No-Tobacco Day 1998 on the World Wide Web at [www.who.ch/ntday](http://www.who.ch/ntday), as well as from WHO's Tobacco or Health Unit, Programme on Substance Abuse.

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All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features as well as other information on this subject can be obtained on Internet on the WHO home page <http://www.who.ch/>



WHO

International Agency for Research on Cancer

PRESS RELEASE

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## PASSIVE SMOKING AND LUNG CANCER IN EUROPE

On March 8, 1998, two British newspapers (Sunday Telegraph and Sunday Times) reported that the results of an allegedly negative study of the World Health Organization (WHO) on passive smoking had been withheld from publication. The investigation referred to is a European multicentre case-control study on the risk of lung cancer in non-smokers exposed to passive smoking, coordinated by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). The principal statements in the newspaper articles were false and misleading:

(1) No withholding of results has ever taken place. In line with scientific practice, a manuscript reporting the main study results has been submitted several weeks ago to an international scientific journal. The working document of the study, containing primary data from all centres involved, will be made publicly available once the original paper is accepted.

(2) The alleged negativity of the study is in sharp contrast to what is reported in the article submitted. An increase of 16% in the risk of lung cancer for non-smoking spouses of smokers, and a 17% increase for exposure to passive smoking at the workplace were observed. For both exposures, there was a dose-response relationship, i.e. greater extent of exposure was associated with a higher risk.

No increased risk was found for lung cancer in adults who were exposed to passive smoking during childhood but other studies have shown that passive smoking by children worsens asthma and may cause several disease conditions, including bronchitis and pneumonia.

The study, conducted in 12 centres from seven European countries, included 650 cases of lung cancer and 1542 controls and is the largest study carried out in European populations to date. The results support previous studies in Europe and the U.S.A. which indicate that passive smoking increases the risk of lung cancer in humans.

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## **Formal abstract of the WHO paper (unpublished)**

We conducted a case-control study of lung cancer and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) among non-smokers in twelve centres from seven European countries. A total of 650 cases and 1542 controls aged up to 74 were interviewed. The odds ratio (OR) for exposure to spousal ETS was 1.16 (95% confidence interval [CI] 0.93-1.44); the OR for exposure to workplace ETS was 1.17 (CL 0.94-1.45). For most quantitative indicators of ETS exposure, risks were highest in the category with highest exposure. A non-significant decrease in lung cancer risk was present with time since cessation of exposure to spousal or workplace ETS. Childhood exposure to ETS and exposure in vehicles and in public settings were not associated with lung cancer risk. No confounding effect was exerted by education, urban residence, exposure to occupational carcinogens, and dietary factors. Interview with the spouses of a subset of cases and controls validated the non-smoking status and the spousal ETS exposure status of study subjects. Our results are in line with those of recent investigations; they add substantially to the evidence available from Europe of the association between ETS exposure and lung cancer, provide statistically stable risk estimates, assess the contribution of different sources of ETS, and point towards a decrease in risk after cessation of exposure."

*Action on Smoking and Health - 11th March 1998*