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September 20, 2013

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More than half of Philadelphia parents who smoke and have young children allow smoking in the home

*Smokers may respond to anti-smoking messages
that emphasize children's health, study suggests*

In a city with high smoking rates, 52 percent of smokers with pre-teen children in their households said they permit smoking at home, a new study has found. The study, by researchers at the Annenberg Public Policy Center and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, also suggested that certain antismoking messages, including a focus on the effects of secondhand smoke on children, were promising approaches to influence more smokers to ban at-home smoking.

The study, published in *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* in August 2013, analyzed data from a telephone survey in May-June 2012 of 456 parents or caretakers of households in Philadelphia with children under the age of 13. Philadelphia has the highest proportion of adult smokers (23 percent in 2012) among the 10 largest U.S. cities.

The study was funded by the Philadelphia Department of Health as part of its *Get Health Philly* initiative (see www.phila.gov/gethealthyphilly for more information).

The study estimated the prevalence of homes with small children in which smoking was permitted or restricted, what effect restrictions have on smoking in the home, and what factors would influence an individual's intention to limit smoking in the home.

Smokers in households with complete bans on smoking reported that there were fewer cigarettes smoked daily at home than those without restrictions. In homes with smoking bans, an average of 1.8 cigarettes were smoked a day; in homes with a partial ban, it was 9.5 cigarettes; and in homes with no restrictions, it was 16.1 cigarettes a day.

Surprisingly, the researchers noted, having a child under five years old in the household or having a child with asthma was not a significant factor in restricting household smoking. The survey found that 42 percent of households with a child under five years old allowed smoking at home, as did 46 percent of those who said they have a child with asthma.

The study also looked at the underlying attitudes of smokers, their intention to restrict smoking at home, and what factors might influence those intentions. Among those surveyed, 47 percent said they were "extremely likely" to ban smoking in their homes in the next three months, while 16 percent considered themselves "extremely unlikely" to do so.

“There are lots of opportunities for effective interventions that would help Philadelphians who smoke institute home-smoking restrictions,” said Michael Hennessy, the lead author of the report and a senior research analyst at the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

Among the ways to change smokers’ intentions, the study suggested, was to influence their beliefs about the effects of smoking. “If caregivers believe that smoke-free homes can improve the health of their children, they might be empowered to take a stronger stand against smoking in the home,” the researchers said. “This is particularly important for the 30 percent of households in which the primary caretaker is not a smoker.”

The study found that emphasizing specific messages – making smokers realize that by curtailing at-home smoking they could cut down on emergency-room visits for their children and prevent ear infections in their children – were promising approaches. For instance, it found that among people who ban smoking at home or plan to, 77 percent knew that that could reduce trips to the emergency room for their children. But that fact was known only by 52 percent of smokers who do not ban smoking at home and those who have little intention of doing so.

“Eliminating smoking from the home is challenging for families, but it holds great promise for improving health,” said Giridhar Mallya, a study co-author from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health. “Based on this study, we implemented a media campaign to motivate parents to make a change – whether by taking their smoking outside or quitting altogether.” Within the first three months of the campaign, which began in April 2013, calls from Philadelphia to the Pennsylvania Free Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW) more than doubled, Mallya said.

The **Annenberg Public Policy Center** (www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org) was established in 1994 to educate the public and policy makers about the media’s role in advancing public understanding of political and health issues at the local, state and federal levels.