



Dutch Youth Health Care: From smoke free houses to smoke free parents

Summary of the Dutch report

What this study adds...

- While Youth Health Care professionals often discuss ways of preventing secondhand smoke exposure to children (by smoking outside) with parents, they less frequently discuss ways parents could quit smoking completely.
- YHC professionals appear largely unaware of any existing policies in their local YHC organisations about discussing smoking with parents.
- YHC professionals need more time for discussing smoking with parents. They also need more materials, education and knowledge about referring parents to specialized smoking cessation support.

Youth Health Care is a municipal health care system in the Netherlands that provides free universal and selective preventive care services to young people aged 0-18. Parents of young children (0-12 years) visit the YHC clinic regularly, where nurses and pediatricians check their children's social, physical, and cognitive development. The Youth Health Care nurses educate parents about parenting and vaccinate young children against common diseases. YHC nurses also visit adolescents (12-18 years) at school to further check their development and to help them with problems they face (e.g., substance abuse).

From smoke free houses to smoke free parents

Parents visit the Youth Health Care clinic about 15 times in the first 4 years of their children's life. During some of those visits, YHC professionals and parents discuss the dangers of exposing children to secondhand smoke. Until recent years, YHC professionals motivated parents to smoke outside at home in order to limit their children's exposure to secondhand smoke. In recent years, several organizations have called for a change in both policy and practice. Among them are the umbrella organization for local municipal health services (GGD GHOR), the professionals associations of nurses (V&VN) and pediatricians (AJN), and the Taskforce for a Smoke Free Start. Supported by the latest scientific insights, these organizations believe the YHC professionals should not only discuss preventing exposure to secondhand smoke at home, but should also motivate parents to quit smoking completely.



What did we do?

We conducted a survey among 429 Youth Health Care professionals (nurses and pediatricians) and 61 managers of local YHC organizations. We asked YHC professionals whether they discussed secondhand smoke exposure and smoking cessation with parents. We also asked whether they refer parents to specialized smoking cessation support. We asked managers about formal smoking-related policies in their local YHC organization. Such policies may describe how YHC professionals and parents discuss smoking, and whether YHC professionals receive supporting materials and education on this topic.

What are the main results?

About 64% of all Youth Health Care professionals ask parents regularly about their smoking habits at home. If YHC professionals know that parents smoke, about 72% of them discuss preventing secondhand smoke exposure regularly and 35% discuss smoking cessation regularly. While 79% of managers believe their local YHC organization has a policy on preventing secondhand smoke exposure in children, only 37% of YHC professionals recall any kind of policy in their local YHC organization. YHC professionals indicated they lacked time to discuss smoking with the parents. They also need more materials, education and knowledge about ways of referring parents to specialized smoking cessation support.

Our advice

We advise Youth Health Care professionals to educate themselves about interviewing techniques, to ask parents about their smoking habits, and to refer smoking parents to specialized smoking cessation support. We advise managers of Youth Health Care organizations to document and implement a policy for discussing smoking cessation with parents. As many YHC professionals are unaware of existing policies, it is imperative that managers communicate such policies well.

Netherlands Expertise Center for Tobacco Control

The Netherlands Expertise Center for Tobacco Control (NET) is part of the Trimbos Institute. It develops, collates, and disseminates independent, systematically tested knowledge on tobacco control and smoking deterrence. The mission of NET is to discourage people from using tobacco, as well as informing tobacco users and non-tobacco users about the harmful effects of tobacco use and tobacco exposure. The NET also provides health professionals, scientists, and public officials with information about tobacco usage, prevention, treatment of tobacco addiction, and policy options.

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