1 in 100 deaths attributed to second hand smoke

World Health Organization (WHO) researchers said that about one in 100 deaths around the world is due to second-hand smoke, which kills an estimated 600,000 people each year.

WHO experts found that children are more heavily exposed to second-hand smoke than any other age-group, and about 165,000 of them die every year because of it.

“Two-thirds of these deaths occur in Africa and south Asia,” the researchers, led by Annette Pruss-Ustun of the WHO in Geneva, wrote in their study.

They found that 40 percent of children, 55 percent of non-smoking men and 55 percent of non-smoking women were exposed to second-hand smoke in 2004 around the world.

This exposure was estimated to have caused 570,000 deaths from heart disease, 165,000 from lower respiratory infections, 36,900 from asthma and 21,400 from lung cancer.

The researchers said that for the full impact of smoking, these deaths should be added to the 5.1 million deaths a year attributed to active tobacco use.

“Policy-makers should bear in mind that enforcing complete smoke-free laws will probably substantially reduce the number of deaths attributable to exposure to second-hand smoke within the first year of its implementation, with accompanying reduction in costs of illness in social and health systems,” she wrote.

Only 7.4 percent of the world population currently lives in jurisdictions with comprehensive smoke-free laws, and those laws are not always robustly enforced.