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EXPOSURE TO TOBACCO SMOKE CAUSES IMMEDIATE DAMAGE, SAYS NEW SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT

Report focuses on how tobacco smoke causes disease

Exposure to tobacco smoke – even occasional smoking or secondhand smoke – causes immediate damage to your body that can lead to serious illness or death, according to a report released today by U.S. Surgeon General Regina M. Benjamin. The comprehensive scientific report - Benjamin's first Surgeon General's report and the 30th tobacco-related Surgeon General's report issued since 1964 - describes specific pathways by which tobacco smoke damages the human body and leads to disease and death.

The report, *How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: The Biology and Behavioral Basis for Smoking-Attributable Disease*, finds that cellular damage and tissue inflammation from tobacco smoke are immediate, and that repeated exposure weakens the body's ability to heal the damage.

"The chemicals in tobacco smoke reach your lungs quickly every time you inhale causing damage immediately," Benjamin said in releasing the report. "Inhaling even the smallest amount of tobacco smoke can also damage your DNA, which can lead to cancer."

"Over the last two years we have stepped up efforts to reduce tobacco use, including implementing legislation to regulate tobacco products, investing in local tobacco control efforts and expanding access to insurance coverage for tobacco cessation" said Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius. "This will remain a key priority of this Administration."

The report also explains why it is so difficult to quit smoking. According to the research, cigarettes are designed for addiction. The design and contents of current tobacco products make them more attractive and addictive than ever before. Today's cigarettes deliver nicotine more quickly and efficiently than cigarettes of many years ago.

Tobacco smoke contains a deadly mixture of more than 7,000 chemicals and compounds, of which hundreds are toxic and at least 70 cause cancer. Every exposure to these cancer-causing chemicals could damage DNA in a way that leads to cancer. Exposure to smoke also decreases the benefits of chemotherapy and other cancer treatments. Smoking causes more than 85% of lung cancers and can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body. One in three cancer deaths in the U.S. is tobacco-related.

The report describes how the delicate lining of the lungs becomes inflamed as soon as it is exposed to the chemical mixture in cigarette smoke. Over time, the smoke can cause chronic obstructive pulmonary disease including emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Even brief exposure to secondhand smoke can cause cardiovascular disease and could trigger acute cardiac events, such as heart attack. The report describes how chemicals from tobacco smoke quickly damage blood vessels and make blood more likely to clot. The evidence in this report shows how smoking causes cardiovascular disease and increases risks for heart attack, stroke, and aortic aneurysm.

Smoking causes many other harmful effects throughout the body, including making it harder for diabetics to control their blood sugar. Smoking makes it harder for women to get pregnant and can cause a miscarriage, preterm delivery, low birth weight, as well as damage to fetal lungs and brain tissue. Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome, the report finds.

“This report makes it clear – quitting at any time gives your body a chance to heal the damage caused by smoking,” the Surgeon General said. “It’s never too late to quit, but the sooner you do it, the better.”

Fortunately, there are now more effective ways to help people quit than ever before. Nicotine replacement is available over the counter and doctors can prescribe medications that improve the chances of successful quit attempts. Smokers can also call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for help.

To help communicate the report findings as widely as possible, the Surgeon General unveiled an easy-to-read guide with practical information about how tobacco smoke causes disease, *A Report of the Surgeon General: How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: What It Means to You*.

Copies of the full report, executive summary, and the easy-to-read guide may be downloaded at www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/tobaccosmoke/index.html. To order printed copies of these documents, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco> and click the Publications Catalog link under Tools & Resources.

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