



News Release

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Washington's adult smoking rate now third lowest in the nation

Smokeless tobacco use among people who smoke a growing concern

OLYMPIA—New survey results show Washington's adult smoking rate has dropped to a new low of 14.8 percent. That's down from 15.3 percent the previous year. Washington now has the third lowest smoking rate in the nation—the state's best ranking since measuring across all 50 states started in 1995. Despite these gains, people from low income and lower educational backgrounds continue to smoke at higher rates. Smokeless tobacco use, including products like chew, is also on the rise among people who already smoke.

“Reducing tobacco use is essential to improving the overall health of our state,” said Governor Chris Gregoire. “This latest drop in smoking means thousands of people will be spared early, tobacco-related deaths and the state will save billions of dollars in future health care costs. It's been a long battle to reduce the rates of youth and adult smoking in our state. In the end, our efforts will result in a healthier Washington.”

Since the state started its Tobacco Prevention and Control Program in 2000, the smoking rate has declined by about a third. The drop translates to 105,000 people spared early tobacco-related deaths and \$3 billion dollars saved in future health care costs. The smoking rates among people from low income or with lower educational backgrounds remain high at 29 and 27 percent, respectively. While people with lower incomes try to quit as often as people with higher incomes, they are less successful.

“Our rise to a number three national ranking is good news for the health of people in Washington,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “I'm pleased with our continued improvement in smoking rates, yet we've still got work to do. We must be sure everyone in our state—regardless of income and education level is included in these gains. We must also combat new trends—like the increased use of smokeless tobacco, including dissolvable products that look like candy. Smokeless tobacco is not a safe alternative to cigarettes.”

—More—

Smokeless tobacco is a known cause of cancer, including cancer of the mouth and pancreas. The latest numbers show a disturbing new trend for these products. In the last 10 years smokeless tobacco use has more than doubled among people who also smoke, a trend that coincides with the tobacco industry's introduction of new smokeless tobacco products and flavoring and stepped-up marketing.

The Washington State Tobacco Quit Line (1-800-QUIT-NOW, 1-877-2NO-FUME) provides free help to people who are ready to quit—including smokeless tobacco products like chew and dip. Quit coaches help callers identify triggers for tobacco use, cope with withdrawal symptoms, and develop a personal plan to quit. Callers receive a packet of quit materials by mail. More than 150,000 people in Washington have called the quit line for help since it opened for business in November 2000.

The Department of Health tracks adult tobacco use through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. These latest data come from telephone surveys conducted throughout 2009. More than 20,000 adults from around the state were contacted and asked questions about tobacco use and other health behaviors.

Several things have likely contributed to Washington's continued decrease in adult smoking. Key factors include establishing one of the nation's strongest smoke-free laws, imposing the third highest cigarette tax in the country, and implementing a comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program. These are core prevention strategies recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as the World Health Organization.

Washington has made progress reducing tobacco use, but more work remains to be done. The tobacco industry spends more than \$146 million each year in our state to market its products. About 45 youth start smoking each day and about 7,500 people in our state die every year from tobacco-related diseases. More information about quitting tobacco is provided online (www.Quitline.com).

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