

Eliminating tobacco would drive down number of cancer cases

By Elisa Tong

In the fight against cancer, new drugs, technologies and ongoing research are essential. But nothing would make a greater impact against the disease than eliminating tobacco use and exposure.

Tobacco leads the list of causes of preventable death, well ahead of obesity, alcohol consumption and handguns. Tobacco is implicated in 11 types of cancer, including stomach, esophagus, bladder, throat, and, of course, lung. Indeed, if tobacco use and exposure were eliminated, the cancer death rate alone would drop by 30 percent, and almost 90 percent of lung cancer deaths would be prevented altogether.

Now, consider the fine print: more than 3,000 people who die each year from lung cancer have never smoked, but have been exposed to someone else's smoke. The U.S. Surgeon General, in 2006, concluded that there was no risk-free exposure to second-hand smoke.

How can you reduce your risk of cancer and other diseases brought on by tobacco exposure?

- If you smoke, you can still quit and reduce your risk for lung cancer. About 10 years after quitting, an ex-smoker's risk of dying from lung cancer is 30 to 50 percent less than for those who continue to smoke.
- If you need help quitting, call the California Smokers' Helpline at 1-800-NO BUTTS.
- When leasing an apartment or purchasing a condominium, find

out if smoking is allowed before you sign the dotted line. In multi-unit complexes, 65 percent of the air is shared among all residents. California landlords have the right to make their rental properties smoke-free.

- Know the loopholes in workplace smoking laws. In private residences licensed as family daycare homes, for example, smoking is permitted after business hours and in areas where children are not present. It is still allowed in owner- and volunteer-operated businesses with no employees, as well as in patient smoking areas of long-term health facilities. And, it's still allowed in 65 percent of hotel and motel guestrooms and meeting and banquet rooms except during food or beverage service.

- Support efforts by advocates to curb or prohibit smoking in outdoor areas such as public beaches, parks and other outdoor places throughout California. These efforts encourage smokers to quit, protect nonsmokers from exposure, and prevent toxic cigarette butt waste.

Smoke-free environments benefit everyone. When it comes to our health, every effort to reduce your tobacco exposure will reduce your risk for cancer.

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