

HEALTH HORIZONS

NEWS FOR YOUR WELL-BEING

The Health of All Children

*Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H.
U.S. Surgeon General*

How often have you taken time off work to care for your child who is injured or ill? You have probably also experienced how easy it is to pass a contagious illness from home or work to your child's daycare or school. And back again.

Coping with children's illnesses and injuries significantly impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of American workers, and often brings increased economic burdens as well. Working parents miss over 126 million workdays each year to care for children with colds, costing the U.S. economy more than \$3 billion from loss of productivity.

It is our responsibility as a nation to ensure that all children achieve their full potential for healthy and productive lives. To help achieve this goal, the Office of the Surgeon General's 2005 agenda is "The Year of the Healthy Child."

We set this agenda because childhood health impacts every aspect of our lives, from how children learn, to how productive business can be, to how we maintain our health and independence into our senior years.

Prevention is the key to a healthy childhood and a productive and independent life. With a resurgence in diseases such as whooping cough and diphtheria, it is as important as ever to make sure that children receive their vaccines on time. Immunizations have prevented death and disease for millions of children throughout the United States and the rest of the world. Talk with your child's primary health provider about keeping up to date on all vaccinations.

Preventing Accidents

Prevention is also the key to reducing injuries. More than 5,000 children die

each year because of motor vehicle and other preventable injuries. Make sure that children are correctly buckled in their seatbelts or car seats every time they ride in a vehicle. If you have any questions about how to install your child's safety seat, many local fire and police departments can help.

Because the majority of childhood drowning, burns, firearm injuries, falls, and poisoning happen at home, some simple accident-proofing steps can make a big difference in protecting your children. To prevent accidental poisoning, move all medications and cleaning products to high shelves. To prevent burns, set your hot water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and never leave cups of hot liquid on tables or counter edges.

Also make sure small children do not play with toys with parts small enough to choke on. You can test any toy part by simply dropping it through a paper towel roll. If it goes through, the piece is too small and could become a choking hazard. Never allow an infant to play with balloons or plastic bags. And, to prevent drowning, install a lid lock on every toilet in your home. Drowning can happen in less than a couple of inches of water.

Supporting Emotional Health

Mental and emotional well being are also part of our overall health. Receiving affection, positive reinforcement, and feeling wanted are all key to a child's emotional development and self esteem. As parents and role models, we cannot be absent from our children's lives. We must consistently provide the support



that they need by praising good behavior and accomplishments. Many times with our kids, as with us, the very best medicine is a big hug from a loved one.

Healthy Choices

We can also make lifestyle choices that reduce the risk of illness. For example, physical activity and healthy eating combat excess weight and obesity in children and adults. Offer children nutritious foods, and avoid foods and drinks that are high in sugar. We must also educate our children about the dangers of illegal, over-the-counter, and prescription drugs. And we must live what we expect our children to learn — a drug-free life.

We shouldn't smoke or allow anyone else to smoke around our kids. Second-hand smoke can have a harmful effect on a child's breathing and can have long-term respiratory consequences like impaired lung growth, chronic coughing, and wheezing. Diseases of the respiratory system (aggravated by second-hand smoke) are the leading causes of child hospitalization in our country.

Nurturing our children and teaching them to live healthy lifestyles is a sound investment in their development, their success, and our nation's future and prosperity. All Americans can reap the benefits of a healthy lifestyle — for generations to come.

BETTER HEALTH WITHOUT SMOKING

Workplace Smoking Cessation

Tommy G. Thompson,
Former Secretary of Health and
Human Services

One of the most important steps we can take for our own health and the health of our children is to set an example by not smoking. And, we can make sure we live in a smoke-free environment, not just at home, but at work too.

Tobacco use is a death sentence for millions of Americans. It's also a major drain on the nation's economy as business profitability is eroded by costs arising from smoking-related illnesses.

Smart employers are turning to tobacco cessation programs to reduce healthcare costs, increase productivity, protect the bottom line and — more importantly — save lives.

How costly is healthcare to American employers right now? Consider:

>> Americans now spend more than \$1.8 trillion per year on healthcare. This will rise to \$3.6 trillion — or roughly 19 percent of our gross national product — by the year 2014.

>> Employee, retiree, and dependent healthcare costs General Motors more than \$1,500 for each vehicle it produces.

>> Overall, the Big Three spent \$10 billion on healthcare in 2004 — more than they spent on steel.

Studies show that smoking costs the American economy \$125 billion a year, while killing more than 440,000 people every year. Smokers typically have 18 percent higher annual healthcare charges, miss more days of work, and suffer higher rates of workplace accidents and injuries than nonsmokers.

The First Step

Controlling costs and improving the

Resource Directory

Telephone Support: 1-800-QUITNOW

Online Guide: www.smokefree.gov
www.americanlegacy.org or 1-800-4-A-LEGACY
www.surgeongeneral.gov
www.aetna.com

Smoking Quit Tips

Cheryl G. Heaton, Dr. P.H., President and CEO, American Legacy Foundation

For the 46 million Americans who still smoke, the struggle to quit is often difficult. The American Legacy Foundation — a public health foundation devoted to tobacco use prevention and cessation — endorses these effective quit guidelines:

- 1 >> Plan ahead:** Plan to quit at least five days before you actually stop. During this time, talk to a doctor and consider over-the-counter or prescription pharmacotherapy (the patch, gum, lozenges, inhaler, etc.) to help with nicotine withdrawal symptoms.
- 2 >> Build a team:** Quitting is hard work. Research has shown that smokers can increase their chances of success by 50% by surrounding themselves with people who support their goal.
- 3 >> Use community resources:** Utilize smoking cessation clinics or group support meetings in your community, or take advantage of telephone counseling.
- 4 >> Identify your “triggers” and smoking patterns — Smokers often pair smoking with another behavior:** their morning coffee, talking on the phone, during evenings out with friends. These activities can become “triggers.” Identify yours and compile a list. You'll then be able to see smoking cessation as a series of small steps that you can manage one step at a time.

quality of life for their employees are reasons enough for businesses to play a major role in their workers' efforts to quit smoking. Clearly, the first step is making workplaces smoke-free.

According to the American Legacy Foundation, smokers smoke fewer cigarettes per day when they work in smoke-free work places. If all U.S. workplaces were tobacco-free, within one year there would be an estimated 1.3 million new ex-smokers, 1,500 fewer heart attacks, 350 fewer strokes and 600 fewer deaths from heart attack and stroke each year. And, medical costs would be reduced by nearly \$60 million.

For all of these reasons, as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, I made all HHS properties — not just the buildings, but the entire properties — smoke-free. If corporate executives are going to encourage Americans to quit smoking, it is important to lead by example and take steps to discourage smoking among employees.

Most smokers want to quit: One recent survey showed that nearly 70% of

smokers who were offered free help to quit smoking took up the offer. It's also a fact that tobacco is highly addictive — and quitting is very difficult.

That's why simply making the workplace smoke-free is not enough. Employers must give their workers the counseling, support, and other tools they need to quit. At HHS, we made cessation programs available to all employees who use tobacco.

I also worked with experts on smoking cessation to help give Americans the tools they need to stop smoking. We established a new national quitline phone service to put people in touch with programs that can help them quit and launched a website that provides advice to make it easier to quit.

By adopting smoke-free workplaces and giving employees the tools they need to quit, employers will have healthier, happier workforces — and that means a stronger economy and a stronger America.

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