

## NC Division of Public Health Tobacco-free Policy

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Why is a tobacco-free worksite important?

The Division of Public Health (DPH) has a responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace for employees. Tobacco use in all its forms (cigarettes, cigars, smokeless, e-cigarettes) along with secondhand smoke and e-cigarette aerosol) have known health risks.

A tobacco-free worksite policy will help employees and visitors create a healthy environment that supports individuals who want to quit their use of tobacco. The policy will also reduce nonsmokers' exposure to secondhand smoke and e-cigarette aerosol.

In North Carolina, the following places have already adopted tobacco-free campuses:

- all acute care hospitals;
- all state-operated mental health hospitals, developmental disability centers and substance abuse treatment centers;
- public schools;
- many local health departments;
- majority of community colleges;
- many private and independent colleges; and
- all state prisons.

#### Why was tobacco use chosen as opposed to other health risks?

Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death in North Carolina and the United States.

Exposing adults to secondhand smoke causes immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system, and, over time, can lead to coronary heart disease, lung cancer and stroke.

Exposure to secondhand smoke is a preventable trigger for asthma.

The scientific evidence is clear that there is **no risk-free level of exposure** to secondhand smoke.

#### Is secondhand smoke dangerous outside?

According to research, secondhand smoke particle concentrations in outdoor settings can in some cases be comparable to those in indoor settings. Exposure to secondhand

smoke can adversely affect the health of persons with respiratory illnesses and risk factors for heart disease along with exposing non-users to 70 chemicals known to cause cancer.

### **Why are e-cigarettes included in the policy?**

The health effects of e-cigarettes are not limited to users. E-cigarette aerosol is not water vapor. It usually contains nicotine, and can contain additional toxins, and thus, it is not as safe as clean air. E-cigarette use has the potential to involuntarily expose non-users to aerosolized nicotine and other toxins.

### **Will worksite policies help people to quit their tobacco use?**

The 2014 Surgeon General's Report states that workplace smoking restrictions lead to less smoking among covered workers. The report cites numerous studies that found worksite policies result in decreases in the number of cigarettes smoked per day, increases in attempts to stop smoking, and increases in smoking cessation rates.

### **Don't people have the "right" to use tobacco?**

Smoking is not actually a legally protected right, and employers have the ability to set rules about whether or not employees can smoke during the workday and on the employer's property.

The new DPH tobacco-free policy does not restrict tobacco users from using tobacco products generally, but the policy does restrict tobacco use specifically at DPH owned or leased facilities.

### **Is this policy unfair to employees who smoke?**

This policy works to benefit both tobacco users and non-users by promoting and maintaining a healthier workplace. Individuals who smoke or use other tobacco products most often started in their teens and now as adults want to quit. The policy and cessation support services help those tobacco users who want to quit. On the other hand, tobacco use is still viewed as a choice, and a tobacco-free policy does not eliminate a person's choice to use tobacco products; it simply prohibits the use of these products where they can negatively affect others.

### **Can a person use tobacco products in their personal cars on DPH grounds (e.g. parking lots) where tobacco use is prohibited?**

No. Tobacco product use, including e-cigarettes, is prohibited inside personal vehicles that are parked on property designated as tobacco-free by this policy.

## **As a DPH employee, am I required to quit using tobacco?**

No. Our goal is to create a healthier, tobacco-free work environment--not to force people to stop using tobacco products. However, DPH will strongly promote QuitlineNC (1-800-QuitNow or 1-800-784-8669) and nicotine replacement therapies through the State Health Plan to provide an excellent opportunity for employees to quit tobacco use if they choose.

## **Will compliance with this policy now be a part of my performance review?**

Adherence to all DPH policies should be taken into account during performance reviews.

## **What programs will DPH offer to assist employees in becoming tobacco-free? Is there a cost for with these programs? Are there any incentives for me to quit?**

Most DPH employees receive health coverage through the State Health Plan for Teachers and State Employees (SHP). The SHP provides a robust tobacco treatment benefit for tobacco users in the plan. The SHP pays for services provided by QuitlineNC (1-800-QuitNow or 1-800-784-8669), which includes four phone sessions with a Quit Coach at times convenient for the tobacco user; integrated on-line web quit services; plus integrated texting services. Tobacco users can use one or all of these services available to them. In addition, the tobacco user can have up to 12 weeks of nicotine patches, gum, lozenges, or a combination of patches and gum or patches and lozenge sent directly to their home, as a QuitlineNC participant who has set a quit date.

Other than the QuitlineNC, the SHP will pay for face-to-face counseling from a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recognized provider, such as a physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant, or those under the supervision of a physician, such as a licensed clinical social worker. After receiving a prescription, tobacco users can pick up over-the-counter nicotine patches for a five dollar co-pay, or get bupropion or six months of Chantix without a co-pay, from their pharmacist.

There is a benefit for becoming or even attempting to become tobacco-free if the tobacco user is with the SHP. By signing the Attestation form that they are getting help from QuitlineNC, SHP members' premiums are cut by \$40 a month.

If you are not a member of SHP, your health plan may cover most of the tobacco treatment medications for little to no co-pay, and may cover the counseling from a physician or a behavioral therapist. You just need to ask what is covered by your plan. However, QuitlineNC will provide free counseling for anyone. If you are uninsured, on Medicaid or on Medicare, you can receive two weeks of patches, mailed directly to your

home. If you are from Orange County, you can receive eight weeks of nicotine patches, gum, lozenge or combination of patches and gum or patches and lozenges through QuitlineNC. Many health plans offer incentives for those who try to quit with a recognized program like QuitlineNC. Check into what your plan offers.