Tips for HIV Clinicians Working with Tobacco Users

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States, killing more than 480,000 Americans each year. In other words, smoking is responsible for nearly 1 out of every 5 deaths. Smoking causes immediate damage to your body, harms every organ system, and leads to disease and disability. For every smoking-related death, at least 30 Americans live with a smoking-related illness. The only proven strategy to protect yourself from harm is to never smoke, and if you do smoke or use tobacco products, to quit.

The types of tobacco products used in the United States and beyond include cigarettes, little cigars, cigarillos, large cigars, smokless tobacco (chewing tobacco, snuff, energy dip, and snus), hookah, electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes vaping), and betel quid with tobacco. Tobacco is an addictive substance because it contains the chemical nicotine. Like heroin or cocaine, nicotine changes the way your brain works and causes you to crave more and more nicotine. This addiction to nicotine is what makes it so difficult to quit smoking and using other tobacco products.

Did You Know?

- Nicotine reaches your brain within 10 seconds
- Research shows menthols may be even more addictive than other types of cigarettes
- More than 7,000 chemicals are found in a single puff of cigarette smoke
- Some teens have cravings after smoking just a few cigarettes
- Three out of four teen smokers who think they will stop smoking in a few years will not
- A pack-a-day smoker spends about $2,000 per year on cigarettes
- On average, each cigarette you smoke takes 11 minutes off of your life

What are the Health Effects of Smoking?

Nicotine acts directly on the heart to change heart rate and blood pressure. It also acts on the nerves that control respiration to change breathing patterns. In high concentrations, nicotine is deadly; in fact one drop of purified nicotine on the tongue will kill a person. It is so lethal that it has been used as a pesticide for centuries. So why do people smoke? Nicotine acts in the brain to stimulate feelings of pleasure. When tobacco is smoked, nicotine is absorbed by the lungs and quickly moved into the bloodstream, where it is circulated throughout the brain. All of this happens very rapidly. In fact, nicotine reaches the brain within 8 seconds after someone inhales tobacco smoke. Nicotine can also enter the bloodstream through the mucous membranes that line the mouth (if tobacco is chewed) or nose (if snuff is used), and even through the skin. The following CDC image details the myriad of cancers and chronic diseases caused by smoking.

What are the Behavioral Health Impacts of Smoking?

About one-half of annual smoking-related deaths in the United States are among individuals with a chronic mental illness and/or substance abuse issue. Persons with mental illness smoke nearly 50% of all cigarettes produced, but are only half as likely to quit as other smokers. And those individuals who have a mental health or substance use disorder die, on average, about five years sooner than individuals who do not have these disorders.
What is the link between smoking and HIV?
The prevalence of smoking among people living with HIV remains between 2- and 3-fold higher than that of the general population and this high prevalence has profound health implications. Research shows that if you are infected with HIV, the harmful effects of smoking are greatly magnified even when HIV appears to be under control through the use of antiretroviral medications. Those people living with HIV who smoke may have less success with HIV drug therapy; may be more likely to experience side effects of HIV medications; may have lower CD4 counts; may have a greater chance of developing opportunistic infections; and we may see higher rates of HIV transmission among them.

What are the short- and long-term benefits of quitting?
It does not matter how long you have been smoking; quitting can greatly improve your overall health and wellness fairly immediately. Within 20 minutes of smoking your last cigarette, your body begins a series of positive changes that continue for years. Within 24 hours, your blood pressure drops, and your risk of heart attack begins to decrease. Within months, you can have better lung function and circulation. Over several years, you can greatly reduce your risk of lung cancer and heart disease. People who quit at the age of 50 are half as likely to die of smoking-related causes as those who continue to smoke.

What are the main types of smoking cessation approaches?

- Nicotine Replacement Therapies
  - *Patch, spray, gum, lozenges*
- Other Medications
  - *Bupropion (Zyban®)*
  - *Varenicline (Chantix®)*
- Behavioral Treatments
- Quitlines (e.g., 1-800-QUIT-NOW)

Other types of smoking cessation approaches include acupuncture, hypnosis, and counseling and support.

What Resources are Available to HIV Clinicians?

- American Lung Association: [http://www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org)
- California Youth Advocacy Network: [http://www.cyanonline.org](http://www.cyanonline.org)
- California Smokers’ Helpline: [http://www.nobutts.org](http://www.nobutts.org)
- California Tobacco Control Program: [http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Tobacco](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Tobacco)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco)
- Los Angeles County Tobacco Control and Prevention Program: [http://www.lapublichealth.org/tob](http://www.lapublichealth.org/tob)
- Smoking Cessation Leadership Center: [http://smokingcessionleadership.ucsf.edu](http://smokingcessionleadership.ucsf.edu)

REFERENCES


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