



# Feature Column

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## Towards A Healthier Arkansas

A Message from the Arkansas Department of Health

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### Time to Quit!

**(Little Rock)** – If you smoke or use tobacco products in another form, November 20<sup>th</sup> could be the most important day of your life. If you want to quit smoking, and studies show that most smokers do want to quit, you have a chance to join the huge numbers of people here in Arkansas and around the world who have given up one of the most unhealthy habits of all.

Since 1976, the American Cancer Society has sponsored The Great American Smokeout. Over the years, the nationwide November event has given people a day to focus on for quitting, which has proven to be a big help. Support and encouragement are very important in overcoming this powerful addiction, and we know that the feeling that you are not alone can mean a lot if you are trying to quit.

The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) wants to help you make a plan and set November 20<sup>th</sup> as your quit date. You can take advantage of the free program offered by Stamp Out Smoking by calling our toll-free number, 1-800-QUIT NOW, to get the help you need to get off of tobacco for good. You will be able to talk to a trained specialist one-on-one who will help improve your chances of long-term success in staying off of tobacco. Studies have shown that working through the quit line can double your chances of successfully quitting tobacco.

The Tobacco Cessation and Education Program at ADH has been very successful at turning our rising youth and adult rates in Arkansas around since it got started in 2002. The research results from the Adult Tobacco Study show that the adult rate has declined from 26.3 percent in 2002 to 22.4 percent in 2007. Since 2001, the rate of current cigarette smoking among Arkansas high school students has dropped from 34.7 percent to 20.7 percent in 2007, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey. Tobacco use is linked to the top four causes of death in Arkansas—heart disease, stroke, cancer and lung disease, so this is especially good news, and can positively affect the quality of life in Arkansas for generations to come.

Although significant progress has been made overall in tobacco use by adults and youth, we still have too many pregnant women who smoke, which is known to lead to low-birthweight

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and premature babies. In fact, a pregnant woman who smokes is between 1.5 and 3.5 times more likely than a nonsmoker to have a low-birthweight baby. Premature and low-birthweight babies face an increased risk of serious health problems during the newborn period, chronic lifelong disabilities (such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation and learning problems), and even death. Babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy are up to three times as likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) as babies of nonsmokers.

A smaller number of adult smokers is already translating into a significant reduction in hospitalization rates for heart disease, stroke, emphysema and bronchitis, according to a study on hospitalization costs done by ADH earlier this year. If you calculate current hospitalization charges for these conditions and apply them to the reduced numbers we are seeing, the bottom line savings amounts to \$22 million dollars in 2006 alone.

It's important to note that these projections apply to only one year, but we are really contemplating a lifetime of savings, and in fact, lives saved for many years to come. As we continue to reduce the numbers of young people who never start smoking, the financial impact on our state is very, very positive.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that smoking-caused health costs and productivity losses total \$10.28 per pack sold. In Arkansas, that amounts to more than \$2 billion a year. So tobacco use affects you, whether you smoke or not.

The cost of tobacco use to Arkansas is staggering, in terms of both human costs and cold economic facts, but the best reasons to quit are really your own. If you want to immediately improve your health, the best thing you can do is make a decision to quit using tobacco.

So why not take some action? Make a decision to quit, and make a phone call to the Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. We can help you make this your time to quit!

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