

Smoke is No Joke

Thanks to the recently enacted state-wide smoking ban, cigarette use has received a lot of attention lately. What can sometimes get lost in the rhetoric is the very real health risks posed by smoking. Here are some facts:

- Close to 3000 youth under 18 begin smoking every day.
- Nine out of ten adult smokers began before the age of eighteen.
- Cigarettes contain over 4800 chemicals including tar, benzene, acetone, hydrogen cyanide, DDT, arsenic and formaldehyde.
- The Centers for Disease Control report that tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.
- Smoking is directly related to approximately 90% of all lung cancer deaths.
- Smoking by parents is associated with a wide range of adverse child health symptoms including asthma, frequent colds and ear infections, and SIDS.
- Chewing tobacco is no safer than cigarettes.

As parents, we are the single biggest influence in our children's lives. It is up to us to discuss the dangers of teen smoking, early and often. Remember, even if your child has already begun smoking it is not too late to intervene. Consider these tips:

- Speak directly about the health risks associated with smoking. Share stories of friends or relative who have been harmed by smoking.
- Focus on the short-term as well as long-term effects of smoking.
- Help your teen develop a healthy self-image. Self-confident teens are better able to resist the social pressures to smoke.
- Help them develop ways to say no to smoking by running through potential scenarios they may experience with friends.