



Smoking: Having the Discussion with your Child

Community Pediatric Asthma Service

Prevention

Children experiment with smoking as early as age 9. Using tobacco is a health concern for everyone, especially people with asthma. Parents can empower children to make the healthy choice to not experiment with smoking.

The good news? Youth who make it to age 19 without smoking will probably never smoke in their lives.

Keep your kids smoke-free - talk to them often

The best thing you can do is talk to your kids – as soon as you can. A reported 9% of Alberta kids have their first cigarette between the ages of 5 and 11. It's never too early to talk to your children about tobacco. As children grow, their view of the world changes. As these changes occur, children pass through stages in their awareness and use of tobacco. A variety of factors can lead to tobacco use and to regular smoking among youth.

Talking about tobacco works

Despite the impact of movies, music, and TV, parents can be the greatest influence in their kids' lives. Take a stand at home, early and often. Talk directly to children about the risks of tobacco use; if friends or relatives died from tobacco-related illnesses let your kids know.

6 years old and under:

- Children begin to form their attitudes and beliefs about tobacco at an early age. Be aware that the people your child sees on a daily basis will influence their perception of the world around them and shape their attitudes and beliefs about tobacco.

6 To 11 years old:

- Until they are about 7, most Canadian children do not experiment with tobacco, but they may be exposed to older youth and family members who smoke or use chewing tobacco. By the time they are about 10 or 11, they begin to move toward the stage of experimenting with tobacco.

12 to 14 years old:

- By this age, youth may have moved from experimenting with tobacco to occasional use (i.e., on weekends or at a party). This is also the age when youth start to test their parents' authority and it is an extremely risky time for smoking to start. Peer pressure begins to build at this stage and it is quite possible that your child will have friends who smoke.

15 to 19 years old:

- The period between 15 - 19 years is a critical time for young people who are most at risk for taking up smoking. Fortunately, recent Canadian statistics show that the percentage of youth aged 15 - 19 who smoke is decreasing. While this is encouraging, it's important to note that over half of smokers have tried their first whole cigarette by age 15, and 90% of smokers have smoked their first whole cigarette by age 19.

For parents of tweens and teens

- In Alberta, there are more than 62,400 smokers between the ages of 12 and 19. Will your child be one of them? We believe you can make a difference.
- Remember, your first conversation shouldn't be your last. The pressures that contribute to a child's decision to experiment with tobacco continue from adolescence to adulthood. Keep up the conversation!

For youth and parents together

- Create ways to say NO. Practice makes perfect.
- Chances are your child will be offered a cigarette. Try to prepare him or her to say no – before the situation arises. Ask if any of the following options would work for them or make up new ones together:

“Is this what you do to be cool?”

“No thanks, I don't want my clothes to stink.”

“My girlfriend has a problem with kissing ashtrays, so I'll say no.”

“Why would I want to smoke?”

“I'm excited about making the team and I think smoking will slow me down.”

“No thanks, I don't want to get hooked. I see people spending \$75 a week on cigarettes.”

“Cancer runs in our family, so I don't want to push my luck.”

For parents who smoke

- Yes, you can still talk to your children about smoking. Research clearly indicates that children whose parents talk to them about smoking are less likely to start. That's especially true if a parent is a smoker.
- Chances are you have tried to quit at least once before. Tell your child about it – how hard it is to quit and why you wish you could.
- If you live in Alberta and it's time to try quitting again, call AlbertaQuits Helpline 1-866-710-7848 or visit www.albertaquits.ca, sponsored by Alberta Health Services.

Cessation

- Cessation is the best thing you can do to improve your life and health. Any attempt to quit smoking will make you stronger. It's never too late to reap the benefits, some of which happen within the first few days. With the right combination of practice, determination and support, you will be able to stop smoking for good!
- You will start feeling better within 24 hours of quitting. The minute you stop smoking, your body will begin cleansing itself of tobacco toxins. Two days after you quit, your risk of heart attack will start decreasing ... and that's just the beginning

Ready for Action

Any successful project, whether it is building a chair or quitting smoking, needs to have a plan. The tools below are Canadian resources that our team have reviewed and recommend to those considering quitting smoking.

- Need help to quit? [QuitCore is a virtual support group](#) led by trained Quit counselors to help tobacco users quit.
- [AlbertaQuits](#) - Free, Convenient and Personalized: Resources and tools for [people who want to quit](#); - Smokers Help Line at 1-866-710-7848
- [Nicotine Anonymous](#): Resources in 17 languages including telephone meetings and online groups
- Information provided by Health Canada:
 - [Quit4life](#): Provides youth with an interactive tobacco cessation program
 - [On the Road to Quitting](#)
 - [Making Your Home Smoke-Free](#)

MORE WEBSITE RESOURCES

- AlbertaQuits Information**
- [E-Cigarettes](#)
 - [Hookah](#)
 - [Pregnancy and Smoking](#)
 - [Seniors and Smoking](#)
 - [Teachers and School Tools](#)

- Informative Videos**
- [The Truth About Tobacco-How much is a life worth?](#)
 - [Anti-Smoking ad](#)
 - [Second-Hand Smoke](#)

Nicotine is highly addictive and harmful no matter how it is used. There are many “alternative” products for people to use and become addicted to deadly nicotine. For more information on these products, read our article “[Nicotine in Disguise](#)”

