

Message from Tommy G. Thompson

Secretary of Health and Human Services

Forty years have passed since the first landmark Surgeon General's report on smoking and health. Yet, smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death in this country. It continues to cost our society too many lives, too many dollars, and too many tears.

This new Surgeon General's report illustrates the harmful impact of smoking on nearly every organ in the body. Its statistics and conclusions underscore the necessity of remaining vigilant in our smoking prevention efforts. We've made significant progress in our fight against smoking, but we still have much more work to do. Some of the important findings in this report include:

- Smoking causes cancers in parts of the body (including the kidney, cervix, and bone marrow) that have not been previously linked to smoking in this series of reports.
- Smoking diminishes health generally. Adverse health effects begin before birth and continue across the life span. Smoking also causes cataracts and contributes to the development of osteoporosis, thus increasing the risk for fracture in the elderly.
- During 1995-1999, smoking caused approximately 440,000 premature deaths in the United States annually, leading to 13.2 years of potential life lost for male smokers, and 14.5 years lost for female smokers.
- Changes in cigarettes that reduce machine yields of tar and nicotine have not had any clear benefits for public health.

The scientific evidence contained in this new report provides an even stronger reason for action at all levels of society. Measures to prevent smoking initiation need to be strong and enforced, especially among adolescents and young adults. We need to deny our youth access to cigarette purchases and prevent advertising from being directed at them. We need to motivate the millions of addicted smokers to quit and facilitate access to cessation programs and therapies that have evidence of effectiveness.

In recent years, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has committed itself to developing creative and innovative preventative approaches. This year, the Department will establish a new toll-free telephone number that will serve as a single access point to the national network of quitlines. This number will give all smokers in this country access to support and to the latest information to help them quit. We're also developing strategies to help pregnant smokers quit through a coalition with more than 50 national, state, and local organizations. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has funded a demonstration project to examine the best ways to help Medicare beneficiaries quit smoking. A media campaign resource center, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), shares high-quality advertising materials on smoking cessation and prevention with states and other partners. In addition, CDC is moving to become a smoke-free campus by the end of the year, and I am exploring making HHS the first smoke-free department in the federal government. These are a few examples of the work this Department does every day to discourage youth from smoking and to support smokers who want to quit.

This report is the 28th Surgeon General's report to outline the negative health effects of smoking. Each report since 1964 has added proof that smoking causes disease. I trust this report will be another effective tool in educating Americans about this lethal addiction. I appreciate the efforts of Surgeon General Richard Carmona and the CDC in preparing this timely report, and I am particularly grateful to the many scientists and researchers from around the world who contributed to its development.