
NEWS RELEASE

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Preparing for Surgery? It may be your time to quit smoking

A new initiative known as Stop Smoking Before Surgery is looking to increase awareness of the benefits of smoking cessation prior to surgery as well as to support patients in their decision to stop smoking.

“Quitting smoking improves recovery after surgery and provides long-term health benefits for patients,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “This Saturday, May 31 is World No Tobacco Day, and in honour of this day, I urge British Columbians to consider quitting smoking as a way to improve their health and wellness.”

The study is part of the Stop Smoking Before Surgery initiative funded by the Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute as part of the Harmonization Project, a collaboration between the Canadian Cancer Society, BC Cancer Agency and Northern Health, along with researchers at the University of British Columbia and Athabasca University.

“Most people who smoke are aware of the negative health effects of smoking and many think about quitting,” said Nancy Viney, Northern Health- Tobacco Reduction. “What many people don’t know is that an upcoming surgery is an optimal time to quit to improve surgical outcomes. This is also important as the north has higher rates of smoking.”

Stopping smoking prior to surgery reduces the risk of complications, speeds healing and shortens hospital stays. Smoking is also a risk factor for lung and other cancers. Tobacco use causes about 85 per cent of lung cancer cases and lung cancer continues to be the number one cause of death from cancer for both men and women in BC.

“It is important that all patients who are planning to undergo a surgical procedure be aware of the benefits of quitting six to eight weeks before their surgery,” says Dr. Nadine Caron, general surgeon at the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia. “We also encourage patients to stay smoke free for their recovery and plan to stay smoke-free long term for better health. There are many provincial resources available to support smoking cessation before surgery.”

A pre-implementation survey in 2013 found that eight per cent abstained and 38 per cent of Northern Health surgical patients who use tobacco products reduced their smoking, yet, few patients reported using the provincial resources available to support smoking cessation, such as QuitNow. In addition, 40 per cent were unaware of the BC ministry program to cover the cost of smoking cessation aids such as nicotine gum or patches. The Stop Smoking Before Surgery program is raising awareness about the benefits of not using tobacco and the resources available to help to encourage tobacco users to stop smoking in preparation for their surgery

As part of the Stop Smoking Before Surgery initiative, all health care professionals who come in contact with patients planning non-emergency surgery are being invited to engage in a brief intervention and to refer their patients to provincial cessation services. Print resources, such as rack cards to alert pre-surgical patients to the benefits of stopping before surgery and QuitNow smart steps booklets, have been delivered to most clinics in Northern BC.

“Quitting smoking is a process and an upcoming surgery is a great time to think about improving your health,” said Viney. “Look for the tobacco cessation resources in your physician’s office and talk to your health care provider to get the support you need to quit.”

Through B.C.’s Smoking Cessation Program and QuitNow services, British Columbians are supported in taking active steps toward making the choice to protect their own health and that of their families. The program provides support in quitting as well as free smoking cessation aids. It is easily accessible by calling HealthLink BC at 8-11 or visiting www.quitnow.ca. There also is information on the QuitNow website specifically for patients who are having surgery.

The Smoking Cessation Program helps British Columbians stop smoking or using other tobacco products by assisting with the cost of smoking cessation aids. Once each calendar year, B.C. residents enrolled with the Medical Services Plan can receive PharmaCare coverage of a single continuous course of treatment of a prescription smoking cessation drug or a free 12-week supply of a nicotine replacement gum or patches—no need to call 8-1-1 for the prescription, just ask while visiting the physician for another reason.

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