

Report: Just one cigarette is bad

cigarette is bad

Every exposure can damage your DNA

· THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2010 · USA TODAY
By LIZ SZABO
USA TODAY

Even brief exposure to tobacco smoke causes immediate harm to the body, damaging cells and inflaming tissue in ways that can lead to serious illness and death, according to the U.S. Surgeon General's new report on tobacco, the first such report in four years.

While the report, out today, focuses on the medical effects of smoke on the body, it also sheds light on why cigarettes are so addictive: They are designed to deliver nicotine more quickly and more efficiently than cigarettes did decades ago.

Every exposure to tobacco, from occasional smoking or secondhand smoke, can damage DNA in ways that lead to cancer.

"Tobacco smoke damages almost every organ in your body," says Surgeon General Regina Benjamin. In someone with underlying heart disease, she says, "One cigarette can cause a heart attack."

About 40 million Americans smoke — 20% of adults and older teens. Tobacco kills more than 443,000 a year, says the 700-page report, written with contributions from 64 experts.

Cigarette smoking costs the country more than \$193 billion a year in health care costs and lost productivity.

Recent changes in the design and ingredients in cigarettes have made them more likely to hook first-time users and keep older smokers coming back, Benjamin says. Changes include:

- ▶ Ammonia added to tobacco, which converts nicotine into a form that gets to the brain faster.
- ▶ Filter holes that allow people to inhale smoke more deeply into the lungs.
- ▶ Sugar and "moisture enhancers" to reduce the burning sensation of smoking, making it more pleasant, especially for new cigarette users.

"This is the first report that demonstrates that the industry has consciously redesigned tobacco products in ways that make them even more attractive to young people," says Matthew Myers of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

David Sutton, a spokesman for Altria, parent company of Philip Morris USA, declined to comment until he had time to study the report.

A deadly practice

1 in 5

Deaths attributed to tobacco annually.

443,000

Americans killed by tobacco per year.

\$193 billion

Annual cost in health care and lost productivity in the U.S. due to cigarette smoking.

4,100

Approximate number of teens who smoke their first cigarette each day.

85%

Lung cancers caused by smoking.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Scare tactic

▶ Elsewhere, warnings more graphic, 13A