



Serving Lee County Since 1947

Lee County Health Department Can Help Tobacco Users Quit

The Lee County Health Department (LCHD) recently recognized National Public Health Week, which was observed April 3rd through the 9th. LCHD's mission is: To promote and protect the health of Lee County residents through health education, environmental protection, public health nursing and support services. Department employees work diligently throughout the year to carry out our mission. One of the many health issues we address is tobacco use.

Tobacco use is the nation's number one preventable cause of death and disease. This past year, we have all had a wake-up call in the form of losing well-known figures too early in their lives to lung cancer. Peter Jennings and Lou Rawls have lost their lung cancer battles, and most recently we learned of the untimely death of actress, singer, and widow of Christopher Reeve, Dana, who lost her brief battle with lung cancer.

Hopefully, these deaths were not in vain, and they will help encourage people to seek out more information about lung cancer, the importance of early detection, and the need for more research and resources to prevent this disease.

Lung cancer accounts for 28 percent of all cancer deaths in the United States; and more people lose their lives to lung cancer each year than breast, prostate, and colon cancers combined. Additionally, smoking-related cancers of the trachea, lung and bronchus together claim the lives of more than 153,000 men and women each year.

Smoking is by far the most frequent cause of lung cancer. Quitting smoking does not completely eliminate the risk of getting the disease, but it does significantly reduce the risk. Exposure to secondhand smoke has also been shown to cause lung cancer.

Most smokers, approximately 70%, say they want to quit. Because nicotine is so powerfully addictive, it can be extremely difficult to do so. I encourage anyone who is a smoker to talk with their healthcare provider about screenings for lung cancer and about help in quitting. There are various methods available to help you quit. Some people are successful quitting "cold turkey". Others need extra support such as the patch, oral medication, gum or lozenges, and/or support groups.

The Lee County Health Department periodically offers Freedom From Smoking clinics. These clinics run for 7 weeks, with a total of 8 sessions. The material is presented in a positive manner – meaning that we know you already know how bad smoking is for you. Rather than lecture you about the harmful consequences of smoking, we present you with valuable information and skills to help you quit. The support from others in the class, who are experiencing similar struggles in quitting, often proves beneficial as well. We are currently in the middle of a clinic, however we will be offering another one next fall. If you need assistance in the meantime, feel free to contact



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Lora Fassler, our Tobacco Control Coordinator at 284-3371 for referrals to other clinics or contact the Illinois Tobacco Quitline at 1-866-QUIT-YES (1-800-784-8937).

The health department is also heavily involved each year with the Lee County Relay For Life, the signature fundraising event for the American Cancer Society. This event is held at locations nationwide and raises money to be used for cancer research, education, advocacy, and support. This year's Lee County event will take place June 15 & 16 at Amboy High School. If you are interested in participating or donating to the cause, feel free to contact Lora at the number above. Most of us have at least one friend or loved one who has fought cancer – some have survived, some we have lost. This event is a great way to honor these special people.

We also provide prevention education to school aged children regarding tobacco. Keeping our youth from taking up the smoking habit is crucial, as studies indicate that it is uncommon for someone to begin smoking if they haven't before the age of 18. The tobacco companies are well aware of this fact, and although they have been court-ordered to not target their advertising to youth, they find ways to do so. They know how difficult it is to quit, and that if they hook someone in their youth, they may have a customer for years to come.

Finally, we recognize and encourage smoke-free restaurants in the county. Providing a smoke-free environment to patrons is not only good for their customer's health, but also that of their employees. Studies have shown a significant increase in the number of smoking-related illnesses and cancer among wait staff, bartenders, and other employees who are continually exposed to secondhand smoke in restaurants and bars.

The Lee County Health Department will continue its work in the area of tobacco control. We need your help. Please talk to your children about why they should not take up smoking. If you are a smoker, please consider trying to quit. Even if you have tried unsuccessfully in the past, this time might work. Often, people do need a few attempts before giving up the habit for good. You'll save money and improve your health. An added bonus is that you stop supporting the deceitful tobacco companies. Good luck and let us know if we can be of assistance.

-Submitted by Cathy Ferguson, MPH, Public Health Administrator