



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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#### **River Region hospital campuses go tobacco free**

##### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Baptist Health hospitals, Jackson Hospital and HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital of Montgomery announce that their campuses will become totally tobacco free effective Jan. 1, 2011.

This joint public health initiative is being taken to promote a healthy lifestyle for hospital employees, patients and visitors in these local facilities. Tobacco use of any kind will be prohibited on all sidewalks, grounds and facilities of the hospital campuses.

“Implementation of a smoke-free environment sends a clear message to employees, patients and their families to stop using tobacco,” said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. “Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Smoking kills more people than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders and suicides combined.”

More than one in five adult Alabamians smoke, with 7,600 dying each year from their own tobacco use, and Alabama pays \$1.49 billion in direct medical costs to treat smoking. Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that in adults who have never smoked, environmental tobacco smoke, also called secondhand smoke, can cause heart disease and lung cancer. Secondhand smoke exposure is the third leading cause of preventable death, killing approximately 800 Alabamians each year. There is no risk-free level of contact with secondhand smoke; even brief exposure can be harmful to health.

“The hazards of smoking and tobacco use are well-known,” said Don Henderson, Jackson Hospital president and CEO. “Our healthcare facilities are joining together to take a more aggressive stance against the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S.”

Over the next six months, each organization will develop its respective tobacco-free policy, informational signage will be created, cessation programs will be enhanced, and multiple communications to patients, visitors, employees and physicians will be distributed.

“Clearly, this is in line with our collective mission to improve the health of the community,” said Linda Wade, HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital of Montgomery CEO.

Russell Tyner, Baptist Health CEO, said, “We hope that the public we serve will join Baptist Health, Jackson Hospital and HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital in supporting this expanded commitment to community health.”

This change is being phased in to allow time for employees to participate in smoking cessation efforts that will eliminate smoking from the health care environment and to facilitate the transition. For example, the Alabama Department of Public Health offers free smoking cessation counseling through its Quitline. This is a service for all Alabamians who want to quit tobacco. If you, a friend or family member are ready to quit smoking or using tobacco, the toll-free Quitline is available to help.

Since April 2005, thousands of Alabamians have called the Quitline to help themselves or family members learn how to be tobacco free. Information and counseling sessions are confidential. Eligible callers who begin counseling can receive a free, four-week supply of the nicotine patch to assist in their attempt to quit. The Quitline is also available to persons who speak Spanish. The Quitline number is 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).

For other information on tobacco, go to [www.adph.org/tobacco/](http://www.adph.org/tobacco/).