



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## 50 years later, smoking still harming millions

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fifty years after Alabama native Luther Terry issued the landmark Surgeon General's Report on smoking and its health consequences, smoking is still the number one cause of preventable death and disease in the nation.

In fact, if current smoking rates continue, 108,000 Alabama children living today will die prematurely because of smoking, according to a new report released Friday. The report, *The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress*, calls the epidemic of cigarette smoking over the last century an enormous and avoidable public health tragedy.

Smoking kills more than 7,500 adults over age 35 in Alabama each year, and costs the state nearly \$5.6 billion in medical care costs and productivity losses, according to the report.

"These numbers are alarming," said State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson. "But the effects of tobacco use are entirely preventable. If we can pass smokefree protections for everyone, increase the price of tobacco, and fully fund tobacco prevention programs, more people will quit and more children will never start. We need to reduce tobacco consumption in pregnancy, a factor associated with higher infant mortality."

Alabama has one of the highest rates of smoking prevalence in the nation, with nearly one in four adults and more than 19 percent of high-school youth who are smokers.

In just the last 50 years, 20 million Americans have died because of smoking. The new report updates estimates on the human and financial tolls of the cigarette smoking epidemic, finding that it kills close to half a million Americans a year and costs more than \$289 billion a year in direct medical care and economic loss.

Since the 1964 report, evidence has linked smoking to diseases of nearly all the body's organs. Today's report establishes more new links, finding that cigarette smoking causes diabetes, colorectal cancer and liver cancer.

The report also said smokers today have a greater risk of developing lung cancer than they did in 1964, even though they smoke fewer cigarettes. Changes in the design and composition of cigarettes may have contributed to this increase in risk, the report said. At least 70 of the chemicals in cigarette smoke are known carcinogens.

New findings in this report conclude that smoking causes rheumatoid arthritis and immune system weakness, increased risk for tuberculosis disease and death from TB, ectopic pregnancy and impaired fertility, cleft lip and cleft palates in babies of women who smoke during early pregnancy, erectile dysfunction in men, age-related macular degeneration, and increases the failure rate of cancer treatment. The report concludes that secondhand smoke exposure is now known to cause strokes in nonsmokers.

Studies show about 70 percent of all smokers want to quit. In Alabama, smokers can get free help by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or visiting [www.alabamaquitnow.com](http://www.alabamaquitnow.com).

To read the full report, *The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress*, go to [www.SurgeonGeneral.gov](http://www.SurgeonGeneral.gov).