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AHS encourages tobacco-free environments

National Non-Smoking Week provides opportunity to increase Albertan awareness

CALGARY – National Non-Smoking Week begins January 18 and Alberta Health Services (AHS) is encouraging Albertans to keep their homes and vehicles smoke free.

Recognizing that the majority of Albertans do take action to prevent and reduce tobacco use, AHS' National Non-Smoking Week (NNSW) efforts – which feature Albertans making smoke-free choices – serve to further normalize the choice to be tobacco free, starting with smoke-free homes and vehicles.

Seven thousand chemicals, including 69 known to cause cancer, are contained in tobacco smoke. Environments that are not smoke free expose people to these chemicals via second-hand smoke. Infants and young children are particularly at risk from the toxins in this smoke because their bodies are developing.

“While the majority of Albertans do choose smoke-free environments, unfortunately, the minority of Albertans who don't choose to keep their environment smoke free remain at very real risk of consequences,” says Dr. Brent Friesen, Calgary Zone Medical Officer of Health. “Second-hand smoke can cause serious respiratory infections, like bronchitis and pneumonia. It can also result in more frequent ear infections and increased respiratory symptoms like coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath, which can make asthma attacks more severe.”

Infants and children are also very sensitive to third-hand smoke exposure, which builds up on surfaces in a home or vehicle, including furniture, clothing, drapes and carpets, where it can last for months.

“Infants and young children breathe near, crawl on, play on, touch, and even taste these surfaces, not knowing that they're contaminated with third-hand smoke,” says Dr. Friesen. “Opening windows may get rid of the smell but it won't remove the chemicals from the air or from surfaces.”

In addition to the health risks associated with second- and third-hand smoke exposure, there is also potential concern related to the vapour from e-cigarettes. While more research is needed into the safety of e-cigarettes, some research has already found toxins contained in the vapour produced by some e-cigarettes. These toxins can increase the risks of inflammation and constriction in the lungs and airways.

To support Albertans in creating – and maintaining – environments free from tobacco and the potential risks of e-cigarettes, AHS' Tobacco Reduction Program has a number of resources available. This includes decals that can be placed on windows in the home or in a vehicle to declare them as smoke-free spaces. The resources, including the smoke-free decals, are available from www.albertaquits.ca.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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