

Helping people quit

During the 1950s smoking was in vogue. Many mothers who wouldn't let their children cross the street by themselves saw no danger in smoking around their children.

Times have changed, in part thanks to the Great American Smokeout, which this year will be Thursday. The event encourages smokers to either smoke less or quit smoking for the day.

According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 45 million American adults smoke. Lung cancer, heart disease and lung disease can be caused by tobacco use. Smoking is responsible for one in three cancer deaths, and one in five deaths from all causes.

Chemicals found in cigarettes include toluene, which is highly toxic and currently used as an ingredient in paint thinner; arsenic, a deadly poison that can burn lips and make breath smell bad; acetone, which is used in nail polish remover; butane, a key component in gasoline; formaldehyde, which embalmers use to preserve dead bodies; and at least seven more readily identifiable toxic chemicals.

Many communities and states in the United States have reconsidered tobacco use in recent years and enacted clean indoor air laws. School districts, institutions of higher learning, cities and work places have adopted 24/7 smoke-free policies.

In Stillwater, places that ban smoking entirely include Stillwater Medical Center, Stillwater Public Schools, Stillwater YMCA, Cimarron Medical Supplies, Stillwater Women's Clinic, Warren Clinic, Senior Perspectives, Total Health, Rehab Center at Stillwater Medical Center, Home Health Services and Meridian Technology Center.

Ultimately, though, the Great American Smokeout is a day for smokers to consider seeking assistance and support to permanently quit smoking.

Free help is available to those who want to quit using tobacco. The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669; Spanish, 1-800-793-1552; and deaf and hard of hearing, 1-866-748-2436) can be accessed Sunday through Saturday from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. The initial contact call takes about five to seven minutes to get all the pertinent information.

One-on-one cessation counseling, which is behavioral based, and options for using nicotine replacement products are provided through the helpline. Many insurance companies are now covering cessation products, and the Helpline can help determine if the client's insurance will include that option.

Clients who do not have insurance may be eligible to receive nicotine replacement patches or gum at no charge, providing certain requirements are met.

Clients must either have quit using tobacco or have made the commitment to quit within 30 days.

According to a Helpline spokesman, people who try to quit cold turkey are only 5 percent successful in quitting smoking. If a smoker only uses the patches without behavioral counseling, they are 10 percent successful. However, a combination of counseling and cessation products lead to a 30 percent success rate. Also, those persons who use the new tobacco cessation product Chantix are achieving a 40 percent success rate, the spokesman said.

For the Great American Smokeout in Stillwater, Stephanie Brown, the community wellness coordinator at Stillwater Medical Center, will coordinate an information booth with materials about quitting smoking on Thursday on the first floor of SMC near the elevators.

Brown also organizes smoking cessation classes. More information about her classes is available at 742-5991.

OSU students will also be involved in the Great American Smokeout Activities. On Tuesday and Wednesday, Share the Wealth, a peer education team, will be at the Student Union from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. providing free "Help You Quit Smoking" packets. The packets are filled with toothpicks, gum, rubber bands and mints, as well as educational information to help an individual to quit smoking.

Many local volunteers are engaged in the efforts to curb tobacco use.

In Payne County, the Breathe Easy Coalition has been active in providing information concerning the harmful effects of tobacco and second-hand smoke. It also has worked toward the passage of clean indoor air laws and laws concerning youth access to tobacco.

One of the coalition's biggest achievements has been to recruit several Payne County businesses to become 24/7 tobacco free.

To continue its work, the coalition is seeking additional community volunteers throughout the Payne County area. Volunteers are needed to speak in school and community settings concerning tobacco use and to help spearhead "Breathe Easy" programs through the county.

The next coalition meeting will be Nov. 29 at 3:30 p.m. in Room 214 of Stillwater Public Library. For more information contact Carolyn Gang, tobacco prevention consultant, PaNOK Area Prevention Center at 780-7485; Larry McCroskey, coalition co-chairman at 372-9170; or Joyce Montgomery, coalition co-chairman at 744-5145.

For youth who are interested in assisting in this effort, Students Working Against Tobacco is also currently recruiting new members in middle school, junior high and high school. These students serve as advocates for tobacco-free environments and help expose the deceptive practices of the tobacco companies.

For more information about SWAT, contact Angie Freeny at Payne County Youth Services at 377-3380.