

Frequently Asked Questions about a Tobacco-Free Campus

Why are military treatment facilities (MTFs) implementing tobacco-free campuses?

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in this country (443,000 deaths annually). Those exposed to secondhand smoke exposure have higher risk for heart attacks and cancers. The U.S. Surgeon General has emphasized that there is no safe level of secondhand smoke. Of particular concern to DoD is the widespread smokeless tobacco use, which causes oral health problems and cancers. Every day, TAMC personnel are treating the adverse and costly health effects of tobacco use among our healthcare beneficiaries. Healthcare organizations have a mission to improve the health of individuals and communities they serve. We need to lead by example and implement evidence-based, effective policies that promote health and a healthier environment. This demonstrates commitment to a system of health in support of the 2020 DoD goal for tobacco free installations and the medical center's leadership role on the major public health issue of tobacco use.

What are the benefits of a tobacco-free campus?

The tobacco-free campus protects the health of our staff, patients, and visitors while providing a supportive environment for tobacco users who are trying to quit or cut back on their use of tobacco. The benefits of a tobacco-free campus are diverse and include:

- Increased mission readiness
- Increased productivity
- Increased physical endurance
- Decreased absenteeism
- Improved wound healing
- Lower costs of medical expenditures associated with tobacco use
- Lower consumption rates among non-quitters
- Improved success in long-range tobacco cessation
- Reduced safety hazards from secondhand tobacco smoke
- Increased cost savings for employers, including costs associated with the risk of fire, property damage, maintenance, and employee benefits (Worker's Compensation, Disability, Retirement, Injury and Insurance)
- Leading by example to the rest of DoD and workplaces everywhere

Have other medical institutions adopted tobacco-free campus policies?

Tobacco-free MTF campus policies have ample precedence. Over 3700 Civilian Healthcare institutions have adopted tobacco free campus policies to include Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins. Federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Health & Human Services are also tobacco free campuses. Within DoD, an increasing number of Navy, Air Force and Army MTFs have already implemented tobacco-free campus policies. Despite initial concerns, the transition to a tobacco free campus has gone smoothly and is well-accepted by the majority of patients, visitors and staff.

What types of tobacco products are affected by these policies?

The use of tobacco products are not authorized within a defined campus boundary. Tobacco products include cigarettes, cigars, pipes, electronic nicotine delivery devices (e.g. e-cigarettes, e-pipe, e-cigar, etc.), stem pipes, water pipes, hookahs, and smokeless products that are chewed, dipped, or sniffed.

Does a tobacco free campus initiative punish smokers and other tobacco users?

The intent of a tobacco free campus is not to be punitive to tobacco users. The purpose is to promote the mission readiness of our Total Force, protect the health of our staff, patients and visitors, help tobacco users to quit and maintain abstinence; and demonstrate commitment to healthy workplace environments.

The issue is not about whether an employee or visitor chooses to smoke or use tobacco; it is about where the employee or visitor smokes or use tobacco. A tobacco free campus policy prohibits the use of tobacco products within defined campus boundaries. Any tobacco use needs to be off campus. If you work on campus and use tobacco, the tobacco-free campus is an excellent opportunity to quit tobacco. Research has shown that most tobacco users are not hard-core tobacco addicts who refuse to quit. Rather, 69% of tobacco users would like to quit and 52% made a quit attempt in the past year. Tobacco-free workplaces facilitate Tobacco Free Living. If you are a tobacco user, we hope you will support the tobacco-free campus initiative and recognize this as environmental support critical to help you succeed.

What tobacco cessation resources are available?

A tobacco-free MTF campus is a great opportunity to stop using tobacco. All employees can discuss quitting with their health care providers and enlist their friends and family as support. We encourage servicemembers and other TRICARE beneficiaries who use tobacco to review resources at DoD's tobacco cessation website, www.ucanquit2.org, which is specifically oriented to DoD servicemembers, veterans, and families. Programs in Behavioral Health and Public Health Nursing provide tobacco cessation classes, counseling, medications and other resources. DoD civilians, as part of the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plans, have had comprehensive, barrier-free coverage of tobacco cessation counseling and medications since 1 Jan 2011. These benefits are provided with no copayments or coinsurance, and are not subject to deductibles, annual or lifetime dollar limits.

What is the best way to quit tobacco?

Many methods have worked for people who have successfully quit tobacco. Some people quit "cold turkey" without any counseling or medications. Research, however, has shown that quit rates are higher with the combination of medications and counseling. Medications can include over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapy, like the nicotine patch or gum, or prescription medications available from a health care provider. Counseling can be obtained from your health care provider, tobacco cessation programs, or tobacco quit lines. Quitting tobacco often requires several attempts before achieving permanent abstinence. Don't get discouraged if your quit attempt fails. The most important thing is to reflect on and apply lessons learned for the next time.

Can I use nicotine-replacement therapy (NRT) products, like gum, lozenges, or patches at work?

Yes, some smokers may choose to use NRT products to manage their nicotine cravings during work hours. If you are still smoking or using tobacco, please be cautious if you choose to use NRT at work. Taking too much nicotine by using NRT while you still use tobacco can cause unpleasant side effects. If you want to use NRT at work, you may want to talk to your physician about appropriate dosing and use.

Don't we have a right to smoke?

There is no legal right to smoke. On the other hand, this hospital has the right to create a tobacco-free environment within our grounds. This is a health issue not a personal rights issue. A tobacco free campus is consistent with our goal to promote and support health and wellness as well as reducing tobacco consumption and conveying a positive message to patients, visitors and employees.

Won't there be more litter around campus because of cigarette butts?

All staff should act as TAMC ambassadors. As ambassadors and good neighbors, we expect that employees and visitors will treat the surrounding public and private properties with respect. This means that staff is expected to avoid littering, including cigarette butts and other trash, on all properties adjoining the campus boundaries.