The Great American Smokeout: Day 1 on the Path to a Tobacco-Free Future

43rd annual event reflects event's evolution to reflect realities of tobacco addiction

For the 43rd annual Great American Smokeout® on Thursday, November 15, 2018, the event takes on a new theme: "Day 1," reflecting an evolution from quitting for the day to the recognition that successful cessation takes time and planning. Smokers are encouraged to use the day to map out a plan for a smoke-free life.

Since 1976, the American Cancer Society has hosted the Great American Smokeout, a public awareness event to encourage people to quit smoking. It is celebrated on the third Thursday of November. Organizations across the country use the event to encourage smokers to take action to quit smoking.

Smoking accounts for nearly one in three cancer deaths in the United States, and increases the risk cancers of the lung, mouth, larynx (voice box), pharynx (throat), esophagus (swallowing tube), kidney, cervix, liver, bladder, pancreas, stomach, and colon/rectum, as well as for myeloid leukemia.

Smoking not only causes cancer, it damages nearly every organ in the body, including the lungs, heart, blood vessels, reproductive organs, mouth, skin, eyes, and bones. About 1 out of 5 (480,000) deaths in the United States is due to smoking.

While the smoking rate has dropped significantly, from 42% in 1965 to 14% in 2017, the gains have been inconsistent. Some groups of Americans suffer disproportionately more from smoking-related cancer and other diseases, including those who have less education, who live below the poverty level, or who suffer from serious psychological distress, as well as certain racial and ethnic groups, and lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

Quitting smoking can be extremely difficult. Experts say the best approach is to start with a plan and seek support. Quitting often takes multiple attempts. Smokers are strongly advised to use proven cessation methods, such as nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs, such as patches, gum, lozenges, etc.) or prescription medications and counseling, or a combination of all, to quit smoking. It's a good idea to talk to your doctor or pharmacist to get their advice. Support is also important. Stop-smoking programs, telephone quit lines, the American Cancer Society's Freshstart program, self-help materials such as books and pamphlets, and smoking counselors or coaches can be a great help.

"The American Cancer Society supports any smoker who is considering quitting, no matter what approach they use," said Cliff Douglas, JD, American Cancer Society vice president of tobacco control. "The ACS recommends patients work with their clinician and use FDA-approved cessation aids that have been proven to help, but also that clinicians support all attempts to quit the use of combustible tobacco for those smokers who are unable or unwilling to quit using FDA approved aids."

To learn more and to start planning, visit: cancer.org/smokeout

For further information: David Sampson, David.sampson@cancer.org