

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 8, 2018

Contact: Karrey Britt
Communications Coordinator
Office: (785) 843-3060

Health Department encourages smokers to participate in Great American Smokeout, Nov. 15

Local Resist coalition urges youth to never start using tobacco

(Lawrence, KS) – The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department encourages people to quit using tobacco as part of the Great American Smokeout on Nov. 15. Deciding to quit can be the single most important step smokers take to protect their health and the health of loved ones.

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Cigarette smoking causes 1 of every 5 deaths in the United States each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For every person who dies because of smoking, at least 30 live with a serious smoking-related illness such as lung disease or heart disease. Despite these risks, smoking is still common practice.

In Douglas County, 1 in 7 individuals identified themselves as a current smoker in 2015, according to the Kansas Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System.

Unfortunately, quitting is hard. “Most smokers want to quit. It’s just really difficult for them to do because nicotine, a drug found naturally in tobacco, is very addictive,” Health Promotion Specialist Sarah Hartsig said. “It takes most smokers multiple attempts to quit.”

The Health Department encourages tobacco users to talk to their health care provider or a Quitline coach. The Kansas Tobacco Quitline — KSquit.org or 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669) — offers 24/7 free counseling services. Most health insurance plans, including Medicaid, cover medications and counseling to help people quit using tobacco products.

“Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health and it’s never too late to quit. There are health benefits to quitting at any age,” Hartsig said. “However, it’s best to never begin using tobacco in the first place.”

E-cigarettes, JUUL, vape pens and e-hookahs have become increasingly popular among youth, and the trend is concerning because they are harmful and can lead to nicotine addiction. For example, the nicotine content of one JUUL pod is equivalent to an entire pack of cigarettes. According to the CDC, 35 percent of Kansas youth — grades nine through 12 — reported in 2017 that they had tried an e-cigarette.

To help educate youth about the harmful effects of all tobacco products, the Health Department has partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of Lawrence to start a local chapter of Resist, a student-led anti-tobacco coalition. Resist coalition members have spoken in support of raising the legal age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21. They also are working on educational materials to share with their peers.