

BINGE SMOKERS WARNED OF HIGH CANCER RISK

Wednesday, 29 July 2009: The state's peak cancer control agency, the Cancer Institute NSW, is warning that part-time or 'binge smokers' are as at much risk of cancer and other smoking related diseases as regular smokers.

New research by the Cancer Institute has found more than six in ten smokers aged 18 to 24 admit to 'binge' smoking as well as 56 per cent of smokers aged 18-39.

"Unfortunately, many people who smoke once a week or only in social situations don't realise that their risk of cancer is as high as a regular smoker," said Anita Dessaix, Manager Cancer Prevention.

"International research also demonstrates evidence that smoking and drinking alcohol together significantly multiplies the overall risk of cancer, especially in cancers of the head, neck and oesophagus.

"As quantities of smoking and alcohol consumption increase, the cancer risk also increases. Smoking and drinking heavily increases the risk of laryngeal and pharyngeal cancers by about 35-fold and the risk of oesophageal cancer is about 13 times higher."

The Cancer Institute NSW survey of 800 smokers has found:

- 49 per cent of smokers smoke more cigarettes on some days than others, with up to 30 cigarettes smoked on a heavier day
- 65 per cent of smokers aged 18-24 reported smoking more on some days than others
- 56 per cent of smokers aged 18-39 reported smoking more on some days than others
- Female smokers (56 per cent) are more likely to 'binge smoke' than males (45 per cent)
- 77 per cent of smokers aged 18-39 are more likely to 'binge smoke' when drinking alcohol and 71 per cent when in a social situation.

"It seems that some smokers, especially young women, may be careful not to smoke during the week, but are overdosing on nicotine with upwards of a packet of cigarettes on the weekend," said Ms Dessaix.

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“The message to part time smokers is that while there’s a high risk of cancer and other diseases caused by smoking, there are also immediate and long-term health benefits in stopping smoking for good.

“Within 20 minutes without a cigarette the heart rate reduces and within 12 hours carbon monoxide levels in the blood are reduced dramatically. After two to 12 weeks without a cigarette circulation and lung function improves and the risk of heart attack reduces.

“Over the longer term without smoking, the risk of heart disease and cancer is also dramatically lower than for a continued smoker.”

Smokers should talk to their doctor or pharmacist about stopping smoking today, or call the Quitline on 13 QUIT and speak to specialist advisor.

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About the Cancer Institute NSW:

The Cancer Institute NSW is Australia's first State-wide Government cancer control agency. It was established in July 2003 through the Cancer Institute NSW Act 2003 to help further reduce the impact of cancer. The Cancer Institute NSW is responsible for reducing cancer incidence, increasing cancer survival, improving the quality of life for cancer patients and their carers and providing expert advice on cancer.

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The NSW Government agency dedicated to the control and cure of cancer
through prevention, detection, innovation, research and information