

Light and mild misleading

An Op-Ed Column by Jason Eberhart-Phillips, MD
Kansas State Health Officer

One of the biggest lies told to sell tobacco is the misleading use of descriptions such as “light,” “mild” or “low-tar” in the marketing and packaging of cigarettes.

More than half of the people who smoke so-called “light” brands believe these cigarettes are less harmful than the regular, full-flavored varieties.

In reality, there is no difference in the ways these cigarettes ruin your health. There is nothing “light” or “mild” about the cancer, heart disease or strokes that sooner or later catch up with the people who smoke these cigarettes, in spite of their healthy-sounding names.

For that reason, on Tuesday, June 22, the use of such terms to sell cigarettes was banned throughout the United States.

The new rule took effect on the anniversary of the date last year that the federal Food and Drug Administration took over regulation of tobacco products. It also came less than 10 days before the ban on smoking in nearly every indoor public place takes effect in Kansas.

When it comes to tobacco, the times they are most definitely a-changing.

In Kansas, we know the arrival of the Clean Indoor Air Act on July 1 will immediately reduce the risk of heart attacks for non-smokers in Kansas communities that have so far lacked local protections. The new law will also cut the state’s health care costs, and it will send young people a message that smoking isn’t a normal adult behavior.

Beyond this, there is evidence that the new statewide ban will not harm businesses, that good health and good profitability for savvy

business owners can go hand-in-hand.

The new prohibition on “light” cigarettes and other deceptive language comes as part of a larger package of regulations, rules that build on actions in 2009 that banned the sale of flavored cigarettes and the addition of tobacco to candy or gum.

The new regulations include a nationwide ban on tobacco sponsorship of cultural and sporting events, an end to handouts of free tobacco samples and giveaways of non-tobacco products, and prohibitions on the sale of cigarettes in packs fewer than 20 – the so-called “kiddie packs” that make cigarettes cheaper and more appealing to children.

At the same time, there are new and larger warning labels on smokeless tobacco products. A similar rule for cigarettes will take effect by the end of 2011, in which new, graphic health-warning labels will cover at least 50 percent of the front and back of each cigarette pack sold in the United States.

It is hoped that each new regulation will make it harder for Big Tobacco to attract new customers, and more difficult to keep their grip on those who continue to smoke.

Despite decades of anti-tobacco advocacy, 1,000 children still become addicted to tobacco in America every day. More than 400,000 American adults die each year from tobacco-related causes, and another 8.6 million develop serious illnesses due to cigarettes and other tobacco products.

Smoking kills more people in America than HIV/AIDS, alcohol use, cocaine use, heroin use, homicides, suicides, fires and motor vehicle crashes combined.

But this terrible chapter in our nation’s health may soon be reaching the end.

The cultural aberration that led a large segment of the American public into a deadly addiction during most of the 20th century does not have to continue into the 21st century. Collectively we can, and we will defeat the insidious hold tobacco has on our nation’s future.

If you are struggling to defeat tobacco in your own life, there is no day like today to kick tobacco out of your life once and for all. If you need free, confidential, personalized help, call the Kansas Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

Dr. Eberhart-Phillips is the Kansas State Health Officer and Director of Health in the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. He can be reached at jeberhart-phillips@kdheks.gov.

Methodists offer obesity grants

Because of the escalating concern about child obesity, the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund has launched a Fit for Kansas Kids initiative backed with a half million dollars in funding for grants.

“Child obesity is a worldwide threat, and that definitely includes Kansas,” said Health Fund president Kim Moore. He cited research which indicates approximately 30 percent of children in Kansas are considered overweight.

In an effort to address children’s weight issues at an early age, the Health Fund is seeking proposals for coordinated nutrition and physical fitness strategies targeting early childhood to intervene with obesity before it occurs.

The goal of this initiative is: “to develop community resources, practices, and policies supporting young children and their families in increased physical activity and healthy nutrition.”

Qualified organizations may apply for a grant of up to \$100,000. However, Moore said more modest requests are certainly encouraged. He stressed that applicants for the grants do not have to be affiliated with the United Methodist church, and described eligible grantees as existing collaborations in Kansas which are working on community health issues, desire to address the target needs, and have a 501(c)(3) public charity or governmental entity to serve as fiscal agent.

The deadline for submitting

applications is Sept. 30.

Informational webinars for interested parties are planned, with the possibility of more being added if needed. The current schedule has two webinars at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Wednesday, and another at 1:30 on Friday, July 16. Reservations are required and can be made at www.healthfund.org. Those wanting to discuss a project idea may call Moore or Virginia Elliott, vice president for programs, at (800) 369-7191.

Elliott said decisions on grant recipients will be made by Nov. 15. The projects selected are to start between Jan. 1 and April 1, and can extend for a period of up to two years.

Information is available online at www.healthfund.org.

K-State scientist offers food handling suggestions

Kansas State University meat scientist James Marsden says he hears it over and over again – that there’s a need to better educate consumers about proper food handling and cooking. Such an effort could go a long way in minimizing the risk of foodborne illness.

“Ideally, food manufacturers should reduce the risk of foodborne pathogens, even in raw foods to minimize consumer risk,” said Marsden, a regent’s distinguished professor in the university’s department of animal science and industry. “Consumers can certainly reduce that

risk further by following safe food handling practices and proper cooking.”

In 1994, the U.S. Department of Agriculture began requiring that raw meat and poultry have Safe Handling Labels. However, that effort has had limited success, he said.

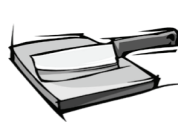
Marsden, who worked in meat processing for many years, provided suggestions:

- 1) Food safety messages for consumers should be concise, consistent and mindful of reasonable behaviors.
- 2) Safe food handling labels should be prod-

uct specific and provide details. For example, a label for ground beef could include more detail about preventing cross contamination and a recommended minimum temperature.

3) Because food safety is rarely taught in schools, government and industry education should target younger consumers using Internet-based messages, taking advantage of sites frequented by teens and young adults.

4) Advertisements with safety messages should be on the Food Network, using celebrity chefs and familiar actors.



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