

Tobacco & Smoke-free Policy Questions & Answers

General Information

Q. What is Five Hills Health Region's Tobacco and Smoke-free Policy?

A. Effective September 1, 2007, employees, visitors, clients and patients will no longer be permitted to smoke or use tobacco products in Five Hills Health Region owned buildings or on the grounds 24 hours per day. There is an exemption for the support of traditional use of sacred tobacco within the First Nations healing ceremonies.

Q. Why is Five Hills Health Region doing this?

A. These changes to our Tobacco and Smoke-free Policy support our vision of "Healthy Choices-Healthy People" We want to reduce tobacco use and affirm our position as leaders in decisions related to health policy. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability and death in this country. As a Health Region, we have a responsibility to be role models by developing and supporting policies and actions in the best interest of health. Evidence has shown there is a direct link between smoking restrictions and smoking behavior, with less people smoking in areas with strong smoking policies. In a recent survey, 82% of Saskatchewan residents indicated support for smoke-free perimeters for health-care facilities.

Q. Does this policy apply to all Five Hills Health Region property, including rural properties, affiliates or leased buildings?

A. The policy includes ALL Health Region owned buildings and grounds, regardless of location. It does not yet include affiliate organizations such as Providence Place or St. Joseph Hospital/Foyer D'Youville and Extendicare/Moose Jaw. We are optimistic that the owners of these facilities will follow our example in the near future. The Health Region expects employees who work in a leased building to be role models and to support our policy by moving off property.

Q. Can I smoke in my vehicle?

A. Employees will not be permitted to smoke in their private vehicles while parked on region owned property. This behavior is strongly opposed due to the risks of exposure to second-hand smoke in confined spaces Smoking in Health Region-owned or a rented vehicle is prohibited.

Q. What will this mean for people coming to Health Region facilities?

A. Visitors, patients and clients will be required to comply with the policy. Visitors are asked to leave the grounds when using any tobacco product. All in-patients and residents, upon admission to a facility, will be informed of the policy and asked if they use tobacco. Patients and residents interested in quitting or refraining from using tobacco can talk to their health care

provider about accessing Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT).

Q. What if I or my client uses spit tobacco?

A. The smoking policy applies to the use of all tobacco products including spit tobacco. The use of spit tobacco (snuff/chewing tobacco) represents a significant health risk and is not a safe substitute for smoking. Here are some facts you and your client should know about using spit tobacco:

- Spit tobacco is made from a mixture of tobacco, nicotine, abrasives, sweeteners and salts. It contains over 4,000 chemicals including 28 known carcinogens.
- Nicotine is the main ingredient in spit tobacco and users become addicted just as they would to smoking cigarettes.
- The amount of nicotine in one dip or chew of spit tobacco can deliver up to five times the amount found in one cigarette.
- Spit tobacco users are 50 times more likely than non-users to contract cancers of the cheek, gums and inner surface of the lips. Spit tobacco can also cause cancers of the esophagus, larynx, stomach, pancreas and prostate.
- Spit tobacco contributes to tooth decay, gum disease and tooth loss, and users are at risk for heart disease, hypertension and heart attacks. (Source: Oral Health America 2001)

Q. How will patients/clients who use medicinal marijuana be affected by this policy?

A. Medicinal marijuana will follow the Tobacco and Smoke-free Policy and will not be permitted in Health Region buildings or on the grounds.

Policy Education

Q. How will this policy be communicated?

A. The policy will be communicated through an informative and educational process. There will be distinctive signage posted near entrances and property perimeters. People need to understand and respect the health environment they are in. We will approach anyone found smoking on the property, inform the person about the policy and politely ask for their cooperation. We are confident people will respect the policy once they have been made aware of the policy and the reasons for it.

Q. I receive services in my home. Since this is my home, can't I smoke if I want?

A. As an employer, we have a legal obligation to protect our employees from the harmful effects of exposure to second-hand smoke. We ask that when our employees are providing home based service, clients will not smoke for at least one hour prior to the visit and during the visit.



Access to Benefits and Services

Q. Will the Health Region pay for patients to access nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), smoking cessation programs, or other services such as hypnosis, acupuncture, or Reiki?

A. The Health Region is unable to assist with these kinds of services. If a person has health insurance, persons should contact insurance providers to see if these services are covered. Alternative therapies should be chosen with care as not all have been well-studied and can be expensive. Some people do find success using these alternative methods but if a person is unsure about a specific product or service, consult a physician or pharmacist.

Q. How can I access Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)?

A. Patients/clients/residents can talk to their healthcare provider about NRT. The patch, gum and inhaler are available for purchase over the counter from retail pharmacies. It is advisable to consult with your physician or pharmacist prior to using NRT products. If you have health insurance, contact your provider about NRT coverage.

Concerns

Q. Isn't the Region concerned about the public image of having smokers congregating off property to smoke?

A. People smoking along the property perimeters is not an ideal scenario. This is a big change and we want to make this transition as easy as possible. Providing designated smoking areas on the grounds or cigarette disposal units near these areas sends a mixed message and weakens our ability to reduce tobacco use. Stopping smoking on the property sends a stronger message about our commitment to health and wellness, our desire to support healthy lifestyle choices and our vision of "Healthy People-Healthy Choices.

Q. What if I want to continue using tobacco products when visiting or receiving care at a Health Region facility?

A. We urge tobacco users to refrain from using tobacco products while visiting or receiving care at one of our facilities. We encourage all patients to remain on property while under our care. If you are a patient and choose to use tobacco products while receiving care, you will be required to sign a waiver to go off property. We encourage everyone to be accountable for their personal safety, including exercising caution and being aware of the surroundings when leaving the grounds.

Q. Isn't the Health Region discriminating against tobacco users with this policy?

A. Legally, the health region has a right to decide whether or not to permit tobacco in its facilities and on its grounds. As owners of health-care facilities, we have a responsibility to create and support policies and actions in the best interest of health for all people within the Region. Tobacco use is the leading cause of death and preventable disease in this country, and we are uncomfortable assisting people to engage in what we know to be

unhealthy behavior. We also recognize smoking and using tobacco products is a powerful addiction and that many people, if given the choice and proper support systems, would choose to be tobacco and smoke-free. For those who choose to continue smoking, we show our commitment to healthy living by creating a tobacco-free environment.

Policy Implementation and Ongoing Monitoring

Q. Isn't outside pollution worse than tobacco smoke?

A. This is a myth. Contrary to public perception, fine particulate matter pollution from cigarettes is actually 10 times higher than diesel vehicle exhaust. The particulate matter from smoking three cigarettes is equal to the exhaust emitted by a diesel vehicle that has been running for 30 minutes inside a garage.

Q. What will be done with tobacco waste?

A. The Health Region will be monitoring the need for additional cleaning of our grounds and the property perimeters. The elimination of cigarette waste sends a clear message about our desire for a tobacco-free environment. We will also remind tobacco users to be respectful of the environment and our neighbors in disposing of their tobacco waste.

Q. How can I best support the policy?

A. We all have a role to play in creating healthier communities. You can best support this policy simply by moving off property when using tobacco products. We have asked our employees to take an active role in making people aware by politely asking tobacco users to move off property. Employees will be advised to neither provide nor accept tobacco products to/from people under our care, unless it is for ceremonial purposes. Any other situations will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Non-smokers can help by respecting this may be difficult for tobacco users and by providing encouragement to those who choose to quit, while continuing to respect the right to choose.

Informational Resources

Q. Where can I get more information about the policy?

A. A brochure, "Tobacco and Smoke Free Policy" can be read on the region's website: www.fhhr.ca. To request a copy to be mailed, please call 1-888-425-1111.

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