

### To Parents and Young People:

As healthcare providers, we care about the health and well-being of all of your family members — regardless of their age. Many things can affect their health. One behavior that can cause some of the most significant health problems is tobacco use. The best way to prevent problems caused by the use of tobacco is by “clearing the smoke” that surrounds this deadly drug.

## The Startling Truth

The underage use of tobacco should be seen as a warning sign for parents, since underage smoking frequently paves the way for the illegal use of alcohol and other drugs. But, it’s much more than that. Tobacco is not just a “gateway” drug. It’s a major killer!

Each year, approximately 419,000 people die in this country from causes related to smoking cigarettes, cigars or pipes, or using smokeless or “spit” tobacco. In fact, more people die each year from tobacco-related causes than from alcohol and other drug use, murders, suicides, drownings, car crashes, fires and AIDS combined. Even nonsmokers are at risk, as constant exposure to secondhand smoke accounts for more than 50,000 deaths each year.

Most adults who smoke started the habit while in their early teen years. In South Carolina, children typically begin experimenting with cigarettes around the age of 12 and with spit tobacco around the age of 11.

The startling truth is that the tobacco industry needs 4,000 new smokers every day to replace the ones who die from smoking-related illnesses. These new smokers are mostly young people — today’s children and teenagers.



## The Health Hazards of Tobacco Use

In addition to causing hundreds of thousands of deaths each year, tobacco use is also associated with many other health risks. These include:

- ⊗ heart disease (the nation’s leading killer);
- ⊗ lung cancer;
- ⊗ cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, pancreas, uterus, cervix, kidney and bladder;
- ⊗ emphysema;
- ⊗ cerebrovascular disease;
- ⊗ chronic bronchitis;
- ⊗ colds;
- ⊗ gastric ulcers; and
- ⊗ sudden infant death syndrome (crib death) among babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy.

## A Dangerous Connection

Many of today’s youth who smoke cigarettes will become addicted to nicotine. But that’s not all. Underage smokers are much more likely than non-smokers to use alcohol and other drugs. For example, underage smokers in South Carolina are...

- ⊗ three times more likely to drink alcohol;
- ⊗ seven times more likely to smoke marijuana;
- ⊗ 15 times more likely to use cocaine; and
- ⊗ 41 times more likely to use hallucinogens.

## The Family’s Role

It’s extremely important for everyone to understand that all young people are at risk of using tobacco products, no matter what their family background or income level. And, it’s important for everyone to work together to change society’s views about tobacco in order to prevent its use among underage youth.

Families can do a lot to make this happen. Parents have a powerful influence on their children. In fact, research

consistently shows that *parents are the number-one influence in the lives of their children.*

Children model their lives after the people they value the most. This can be good — when the parents model positive, healthy behaviors — or it can be bad — when they model unhealthy behaviors that send the wrong messages to their children.



## Identifying the Risks

Many factors in the home and in the community can have a negative influence on today’s young people and give them the impression that no one really cares — that underage tobacco use really *isn’t* a problem.

Several of these “risk factors” can be identified by answering the following questions. Any “yes” response suggests the need to examine the risks surrounding today’s children.

Yes No

- Do any members of the family smoke or approve of smoking or the use of spit tobacco by others?
- Do any family members abuse alcohol or use other drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine?
- Do the children go unsupervised and undisciplined?
- Do the children have close friends who smoke, use spit tobacco, drink alcohol or use other drugs?
- Is it easy for the children to purchase or obtain tobacco in the community?

- Does the family tolerate the children's rebellion against authority?
- Are school problems common among the children?
- Are family values, norms and expectations unclear or inconsistent in the family?
- Do the children feel isolated or alienated from the family, the school or the community?
- Are the children around smokers at school or recreational events?

## Protecting Today's Children

Some of the risk factors identified above can be reduced when certain "protective factors" are present. Unlike in the previous section, "yes" responses to these statements indicate that today's children are receiving strong, positive messages that can help protect them from getting involved with alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

Yes No

- The family has clear, healthy and consistent rules and standards for their children.
- The parents have a close and nurturing relationship with their children.
- The parents encourage their children to go to school or get job training.
- The family understands its history of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse.
- The children have other positive and supportive relationships outside of the immediate family.
- The children have a resilient temperament and are able to "bounce back" from problems.
- The children have positive social interaction with others.
- The family shares responsibilities and chores together.
- The parents listen to their children and discuss family issues with them on a regular basis.

## Clearing the Smoke

Both parents and young people can take many actions to help clear the smoke about this important issue. People of all ages and from all walks of life can help today's young people safely avoid problems that often begin with what seems like an innocent act — smoking cigarettes or using other tobacco products.

Together, everyone can help prevent today's children from suffering the health problems often caused by the use of tobacco.

*Please consult with the physician or agency identified below for more information on smoking and health.*

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# Clearing the Smoke!

