

Media Release:

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World No Tobacco Day

World No Tobacco Day, 31 May, is celebrated around the world and by The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA to draw attention to the tobacco epidemic and the preventable death and diseases it causes.

Each year a specific theme is created around this campaign and the focus for 2009 is the role **“Tobacco Health Warnings”** have in preventing further tobacco related deaths.

Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death. More than five million people die from the effects of tobacco every year — more than from HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. It is the only legal consumer product that kills when used exactly as the manufacturer intends. Up to half of all smokers will die from a tobacco-related disease.

Every eight seconds someone, somewhere in the world is killed as a result of tobacco use.

Tobacco health warnings that contain both pictures and words are effective at convincing users to quit and reduce the appeal of tobacco for those who are not yet addicted. The introduction of pictures displaying the harmful effect of tobacco would further discourage non-smokers to start this highly addictive habit. Nicotine is a highly addictive substance. Warning people about its true risks can go a long way towards reducing tobacco addiction.

"World No Tobacco Day aims to reinforce the messages on the negative health effects of smoking for current smokers, ex-smokers vulnerable to relapse and potential future smokers such as our youth," Michelle Kearney, The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA. "It's a good day to choose to quit and protect yourself from future heart disease!"

ENDS.

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- The impact of the tobacco control policies is dramatic! In South Africans (15 years and older), the smoking prevalence decreased from 32% in 1993 to 24% in 2003.

- However, quitting rates are low amongst women, white people, those with a secondary education level and households with a high income.
- Of particular concern is the high prevalence of smoking amongst pregnant women. These women often land up having low birth-weight babies or having numerous complications of pregnancy that can be life threatening to both mother and baby.