

PRESS RELEASE

Teenage girls who smoke are more vulnerable to breast cancer

As the spotlight falls on breast cancer this October, it's time to give our teens even more reason not to light up. Research indicates that adolescent breast tissue is particularly vulnerable to the carcinogenic properties of tobacco. Considering the high incidence of breast cancer in South Africa, (lifetime risk of 1 in 26 women) and the fact that over 16% of young learners smoke, we must find ways to stop girls from becoming hooked on nicotine, says Lorraine Govender of the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA).

Govender cites the UK-based Generations study, a large cohort study published in Breast Cancer Research, which has linked early smoking to a significantly increased risk of breast cancer in younger, perimenopausal women. "The research found if girls start smoking at younger than 17 years, their risk of developing breast cancer in the future was 24% more likely than those who didn't smoke," says Govender. "The reason is that at puberty, the breast is made up of structures which are sensitive to chemical carcinogenesis – in other words the chemicals in tobacco can trigger cancer. The study explains that the period from puberty to when a woman first gives birth may represent a window of particular susceptibility to breast cancer. It's important that teen girls are aware of this risk."

The study further found that once you quit, the increased risk of developing breast cancer remains, remaining significantly increased for 20 years after stopping, says Govender. A family history of breast cancer combined with smoking further compounded the risk. "In the study women with a genetic risk who also smoked, were 26% more likely to develop breast cancer if you they started before age 20, and 56% more likely than non-smokers if they started after age 20," says Govender.

Smoking also makes treatment and recovery more challenging for those who develop cancer, says Govender. "Smoking can increase complications from breast cancer treatment. It makes healing after surgery and breast reconstruction more difficult and can increase the risk of blood clots when taking hormonal therapy medicines," says Govender.

CANSA is an anchor partner of the **Protect Our Next** partnership which includes the National Council Against Smoking (NCAS), The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) and the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC). The health organisations are advocating for the urgent implementation of the **Control of Tobacco Products and Electronic Delivery Services Bill**, currently moving through its policy pathway in South Africa.

According to Govender, tightening tobacco controls is a vital step forward in reducing cancer risks and protecting our youth. "Most smokers start in their teens, and this can result in a lifelong addiction to nicotine. Products like e-cigarettes and vapes, which heavily marketed to youth and currently

unregulated, are risky in themselves and can also drive nicotine addiction that is a gateway to smoking cigarettes.

"We must ensure that we have policies in place that protect young people from these toxic, carcinogenic products. Too many lives are lost through cancers resulting from tobacco addiction, and we need to reduce every risk factor," says Govender. "We believe that the new Bill, which includes measures such as regulating e-cigarettes, eliminating vending machines and making public areas smoke-free, will make it harder for people to start smoking, and more aware of the need to stop. Let's make sure our next generation is free from tobacco, rather than increasing their risk of cancer."

(ENDS)

HOW CAN YOU JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE TOBACCO EPIDEMIC?

- Follow @protectournext on social media and become an anti-tobacco warrior.
- Educate yourself and others on the harms of nicotine and tobacco product use.
- Support the implementation of the *Control of Tobacco Products and Electronic Delivery Systems Bill* in South Africa. This will improve tobacco control legislation and can help prevent industry exploitation of regulatory loopholes to manipulate children and adolescents to start using tobacco products like e-cigarettes, cigarettes and hookah pipes

#protectournext

[@protectournext](https://twitter.com/protectournext)

www.protectournext.co.za

(ENDS)

RESOURCES:

Smoking and risk of breast cancer in the Generations Study cohort

<https://breast-cancer-research.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13058-017-0908-4>

<https://www.breastcancer.org/risk/factors/smoking>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/vaping-devices-electronic-cigarettes>

Available for interview:

Lorraine Govender, National Advocacy Co-Ordinator, CANSA

Dr Catherine Egbe, Specialist Scientist: Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council

Savera Kalideen, Executive Director, NCAS

Professor Pamela Naidoo, CEO, The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa

Zanele Mthembu, Public Health Policy and Development Consultant

Media contact:

Tamaryn Brown

Connect Media for CART agency

tamaryn@cart.agency

tamaryn@connectmedia.co.za

+ 27 (0) 84 3510560