

DH calls on smokers to support World No Tobacco Day

The Department of Health (DH) today (May 31) reminded members of the public that smoking may cause heart disease, stroke and many kinds of non-communicable diseases, and called for smokers to support World No Tobacco Day by quitting smoking as early as possible for the health of themselves and their families and friends.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has marked May 31 as World No Tobacco Day annually to highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use and advocate effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption. The theme this year is "Tobacco and heart disease".

"It is a well-established fact that smoking is an important risk factor in many chronic diseases, including heart disease and other cardiovascular diseases. That also includes ischaemic heart disease (IHD) (also known as coronary heart disease). Smoking raises the level of lipids in blood while the toxins in the tobacco damage the cells that line the coronary arteries, causing accumulation of fatty deposits in the inner walls of coronary arteries and narrowing of lumens. It will obstruct blood flow through the coronary arteries, causing chest pain when there is insufficient oxygen to the heart muscle and finally muscle damage. Similarly, stroke may be triggered if the blood flow of blood vessels in the brain is hindered," a spokesman for the DH said.

"In Hong Kong, heart disease was the third leading cause of death in 2016, amounting to 6 200 deaths (about 13 per cent of deaths from all causes). As early as 1998, a local study showed that the risk of dying from IHD in male smokers aged 35 to 69 was nearly 60 per cent higher than that of non-smoking males. Among women, the risk was nearly doubled for smokers compared to non-smokers. For stroke, the same local study showed that the risk of dying from stroke in male smokers aged 35 to 69 was 75 per cent higher than that of non-smoking males, while the comparative risk from women was nearly 30 per cent higher," the spokesman added.

In addition, the spokesman emphasised that the hazards of secondhand smoke cannot be neglected. According to the WHO, tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure contribute to more than 10 per cent of all heart disease deaths. A study revealed that the risks of dying from IHD and stroke in non-smokers aged 60 or over who were exposed to secondhand smoke at home were nearly 40 per cent and 50 per cent higher respectively than the risks for those who were not. The result also showed that the risk of a non-smoker dying from stroke increased if the number of smokers in the same household increased.

"Secondhand smoke from smokers will harm family members as well. Smokers should quit smoking as early as possible for their own sake and that of their

families. Besides, the Government has launched 'Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong' since May 4 this year. It defines nine local targets on four non-communicable diseases (namely cancers, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases) and four behavioural risk factors, to be achieved by 2025. One of the targets is to achieve a 30 per cent relative reduction in the prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15 and above," the spokesman urged.

Smokers who intend to quit smoking can call the DH's Integrated Smoking Cessation Hotline on 1833 183. The hotline is operated by registered nurses, providing professional counselling services on smoking cessation. Cases will be referred to suitable social service agencies for follow-up when necessary.