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News Release

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Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

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VA supports Great American Spit Out, encouraging Veterans to quit smokeless tobacco

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) is urging Veterans with smokeless tobacco habits to participate in the "Great American Spit Out" on Feb. 23.

Sponsored by the Department of Defense, the annual nationwide observance challenges smokeless tobacco users to quit for good by committing to a "quit date."

"Whether you're using smokeless or smoking tobacco, quitting is possible," said Kim Hamlett-Berry, VA's national program director for Tobacco and Health Policy and Programs. "VA has the tools to help Veterans set a quit date, find their personal motivation — be it to improve your health or to just save money — and provide the support and treatment they need to quit for good. We're confident that, with the right information and resources, many more Veterans will choose to be tobacco-free."

Veterans who use smokeless tobacco must deal with the heavy economic burdens that come with dipping or chewing. According to the American Cancer Society, a one-can-a-day habit can cost more than \$1,400 a year.

"By quitting smokeless tobacco, Veterans can spend less time worrying about their health and budget and more time participating in the activities they love," Hamlett-Berry said.

Research shows smoking is one of the most preventable causes of premature death. Yet smokeless tobacco, such as dip and chew, is dangerous and often overlooked. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), smokeless tobacco products contain 2,000 chemical compounds, including 30 cancer-causing chemicals, such as arsenic, nickel, lead and formaldehyde. These substances can increase a user's risk of death from heart disease and stroke; cause cancer of the mouth, esophagus and pancreas; and result in painful, chronic dental problems, such as mouth sores and tooth loss, HHS reported.

The National Cancer Institute's Smokefree.gov initiative noted dip and chew tobacco contained more nicotine than cigarettes, which may cause an even stronger addiction than smoking.

To observe this year's Spit Out, VA is partnering with other federal agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office of Smoking and Health, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the National Cancer Institute's Smokefree.gov Initiative and the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Tobacco Products.

Veterans interested in becoming tobacco-free can access VA resources, including:

Tobacco Quitline (855-QUIT-VET; (855-784-8838)): This VA hotline connects Veterans with a trained counselor who can help them develop a quit plan, provide individualized counseling and identify strategies to prevent relapse.

SmokefreeVET: By texting "VET" to 47848, Veterans can sign up for VA's text-message support program, which offers 24/7 encouragement, advice and tips to help tobacco users quit for good.

Smokefree.gov Quit Plan: Veterans can use the resources developed alongside Smokefree.gov to build a plan that prepares them for quitting smokeless tobacco and increases their likelihood of staying tobacco-free.

To learn more about tobacco cessation, visit: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/smoking/index.asp>

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