

N.J. to help smokers kick habit with free nicotine replacement treatments

Published: Thursday, June 09, 2011, 4:40 PM Updated: Thursday, June 09, 2011, 4:41 PM



By **Seth Augenstein/The Star-Ledger**

The state Department of Health and Senior Services is trying to help smokers kick the butts.

The department is now offering free nicotine replacement treatment — such as patches and gum — to help tobacco users quit the habit.

The goal is to get smokers to register with the NJ Quitline, by pledging to five or more counseling sessions.

“This is a way to drive smokers to a program we know works,” said Mary O’Dowd, the commissioner of health.

The new program is mostly funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some extra funding was provided by the state’s Tobacco Age of Sale Enforcement program. About 600 quit-smoking kits have been distributed already, and supplies are limited, O’Dowd added.

About 1.15 million — 18 percent — of New Jersey residents smoke. Studies have shown that the vast majority of smokers want to quit, but only 10 percent who want to stop succeed without outside help. Tobacco use continues to be the single biggest cause of preventable disease across the country, according to the state health department. Roughly 6,000 new lung cancer cases appear in the state every year, and 4,400 people die from the disease, O’Dowd said. Roughly 90 percent of lung cancer cases are caused by smoking, the commissioner added.

The NJ Quitline, which started in 2001, is a free, confidential and multilingual phone-based counseling and referral service for smokers who want to quit. From 2009-2010 the helpline helped 3,000 smokers reduce or quit smoking, according to the department.

The helpline is 1-866-NJSTOPS. Quit Coaches are available seven days a week, from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m.

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A man smokes a cigarette in San Francisco in this May 31 file photo.