

## Tax Increase Spurs Calls to Tobacco Quitlines

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DENVER — A tobacco tax increase that takes effect today has smokers calling quitlines in unprecedented numbers. Callers to quitlines operated by National Jewish Health have increased steadily through March, reaching 2,898 callers on Tuesday, almost four times as many as would be expected on a normal March day.

National Jewish Health operates quitlines for six states - Ohio, Iowa, Colorado, New Mexico, Montana and Idaho - and for several health plans.

"This price hike seems to be inspiring many people to make a quit attempt and change an addictive behavior that harms their health and costs them money," said Matt Keelin, Director of Health Initiatives at National Jewish Health. "We are adding staff to handle the surge in calls, but ask callers to be patient; you may have to wait on hold or leave a message. We promise, however, that we will contact you as soon as possible."

January is normally the busiest time of year with people following through on their New Year's resolutions to quit smoking. In early January 2009, National Jewish received an average of 1,260 calls per day to its quitlines. Normally, calls would drop to about 750 per day in March. Instead, numbers have grown steadily in March, reaching 2,898 on Tuesday.

Today, April 1, a 62-cent federal tax hike on all tobacco products takes effect, although tobacco companies raised prices on many products several weeks ago in advance of the tax hike. The tax will help fund the nationwide Children's Health Insurance Program.

The quitlines operated by National Jewish Health are free to state residents or health plan members. Participants receive educational materials, customized coaching from trained tobacco-cessation counselors, and unlimited inbound calls for people needing extra help in their effort to remain tobacco-free. Program participants can also receive free nicotine-replacement therapy.

Participation in the quitlines operated by National Jewish Health increase by about sevenfold a smoker's chances of quitting. Thirty-three percent of quitline participants remain tobacco-free six months after completing the program. Less than 5 percent of people trying to quit on their own succeed.

Tobacco-users wanting to quit can call a national hotline, 1-800-QUIT-NOW, and will be directed to their individual state quitlines.

**National Jewish Health** is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 120 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit the media resources page.

### Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

**William Allstetter**  
303.398.1002  
allstetterw@njhealth.org

**Adam Dormuth**  
303.398.1082  
dormutha@njhealth.org