It’s never too late if you want to quit smoking

More than 400,000 deaths occur each year as a result of cigarette smoking. While some may believe that smokers put only themselves at risk, second-hand smoke for others also is a cause of death, mainly from heart disease. Second-hand smoke is responsible for approximately 40,000 deaths a year. Smoking can also put an unborn baby at risk for complications. Quitting and staying away from smoking is difficult, but there are several ways to help achieve that goal.

What are the benefits of quitting smoking?

It reduces the chances of developing or dying from heart disease, lung disease, stroke or cancer.

It reduces the risk of developing osteoporosis.

It reduces the risk of developing sexual problems and also helps keep your skin looking younger.

The rate of decline in lung function is slower among people who quit smoking than among those who continue to smoke.

Is it too late for me to quit? I smoke a lot?

No, it is never too late to quit. However, the sooner you quit, the greater the benefits. You can quit at any age. Also, the ability to quit is not dependent on how much one has smoked.

Will I gain weight upon quitting?

Some people might gain weight upon quitting. However, the benefits of quitting outweigh this problem. A good diet and exercise with quitting will avoid any weight gain.

What are the symptoms of withdrawal upon quitting smoking?

Withdrawal symptoms result when the body becomes devoid of the chemicals such as “nicotine” in a smoke.

Withdrawal symptoms may include being irritable, anxious or restless; getting easily frustrated or having trouble sleeping. Sometimes depression also can be a symptom.

How can I start my Quit?

Smoking can easily be given up with your determination. Learn about “START”:

A: Anticipate or plan ahead for difficult times during time of quitting

R: Remove cigarettes and other tobacco products from your environment like home, car and work

T: Talk to your doctor about getting help to quit

Medicines:

Nicotine replacement therapy reduces the craving for nicotine and helps with withdrawal symptoms. Products include skin patches, lozenges, nasal sprays, and inhalers as well as electronic cigarettes. There are also several prescription medications available to reduce craving which can be given to you by your doctor.

The chances of quitting are better with a team effort with you, guidance from your health counselor and your health care provider.

To increase your chance of quitting, avoid being close to smokers and places associated with smoking. Studies have shown that it takes few attempts before getting successful in quitting smoking.

So get started to a healthier way of life and quit smoking. Bristol Hospital’s pulmonary medicine team is committed to helping with your quit plan.

Bristol Hospital also is presenting a smoking cessation program with a systematic approach to quitting. This program has been developed by the American Lung Association and is the result of decades of research. Its best credential is that thousands of people have left smoking behind them forever after completing the course.

Our sessions are facilitated by health care professionals certified by the American Lung Association.

For your convenience, we are offering day sessions at the Bristol Hospital Counseling Center, 420 North Main Street in Bristol and evening sessions Ingraham Manor Skilled Nursing, 400 North Main Street, Bristol. For more information or to register, please call 860-583-5588.

WHO declares global emergency over spread of Zika virus

By JAMEY KEATEN and MARIA CHENG
ASSOCIATED PRESS

GENEVA — The World Health Organization declared an international emergency on Monday over the explosive spread of the mosquito-borne Zika virus, which is linked to birth defects in the Americas, saying it is an “extraordinary event.”

The U.N. health agency convened an emergency meeting of independent experts in Geneva to assess the outbreak after noting a suspicious link between Zika's arrival in Brazil last year and a surge in the number of babies born with abnormally small heads.

“After a review of the evidence, the committee advised that the clusters of microcephaly and other neurological complications constitute an extraordinary event and public health threat to other parts of the world,” WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said.

WHO estimates there could be up to 4 million cases of Zika in the Americas in the next year, but no recommendations were made to restrict travel or trade.

“It is important to understand, there are several measures pregnant women can take,” Chan said. “If you can delay travel and it does not affect your other family commitments, it is something they can consider.

“If they need to travel, they can get advice from their physician and take personal protective measures, like wearing long sleeves and shirts and pants and use mosquito repellent.”

The last such public health emergency was declared for the devastating 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which killed more than 11,000 people. A similar declaration was made for polio in 1947 in a Ugandan forest but until last year, it wasn’t believed to cause any serious effects; about 80 percent of infected people never experience symptoms. The virus has also been linked to Guillain-Barre syndrome, which causes muscle weakness and nerve problems.

“It is important to understand, there are several measures pregnant women can take.”

MARGARET CHAN
WHO director-general

WHO, which was widely criticized for its slow response to the 2014 Ebola crisis in West Africa, has been eager to show its responsiveness this time. Despite dire warnings that Ebola was out of control in mid-2014, WHO didn’t declare an emergency until August, when nearly 1,000 people had died.

Its officials say that up to 4 million cases of Zika could turn up in the Americas within the next year. Zika was first identified in 1947 in a Ugandan forest but until last year, it wasn’t believed to cause any serious effects; about 80 percent of infected people never experience symptoms. The virus has also been linked to Guillain-Barre syndrome, which causes muscle weakness and nerve problems.

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WHO officials say it could be six to nine months before science proves or disproves any connection between Zika and the spike in the number of babies born in Brazil with abnormally small heads.

Lindmeier said, noting that abnormally small heads in newborns can have many causes — such as the effects of herbicides, alcohol use, or drugs and toxins. “This is exactly what is the concerning question: why do we see this in Brazil?”

Jimmy Whitworth, an infectious diseases expert at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said we might soon see other babies born with malformed heads as the virus becomes entrenched in other countries.

“It could be that we're getting the strongest signal in Brazil,” he said before WHO's announcement. “But having these cases occurring and pinning it to Zika is tough.”

Whitworth said it was important for WHO to act quickly, despite definitive evidence that Zika is responsible for the surge in microcephaly cases.

“For situations like this, you have to essentially have a 'no regrets' policy,” he said.

Maybe this will be a false alarm when more information is available months later, but it's serious enough on the evidence we have right now that we have to act.”