

Alaska Tobacco Control Alliance Position Statement: Smokeless Tobacco as a Harm Reduction Product

Smokeless Tobacco:

- **Definition:** smokeless tobacco relates to tobacco products without combustion or pyrolysis during use. (Pyrolysis refers to the transformation of a substance produced by the action of heat.)¹
- **Types of smokeless tobacco:** Include, but not limited to, chewing tobacco (loose leaf, plug, twist), moist and dry snuff, iqmik, snus, dissolvables, strips, sticks, orbs.

What We Know:

- NO tobacco product is completely safe.²
- Smokeless tobacco products increase the risk of many cancers - oral, pharynx, larynx, stomach, pancreatic, esophageal- as well as heart disease, gum disease, and dental caries.³
- Smokeless tobacco use during pregnancy increases the risks for preeclampsia, premature birth, and low birth weight.⁴
- Nicotine, a highly addictive substance, is a major ingredient in smokeless tobacco products. Its addictive properties are enhanced by manufacturers to make quitting tobacco more difficult.⁵
- Tobacco company marketing of smokeless tobacco products more than doubled from 2005 to 2008 and has increased by 277% since 1998.⁶
- Smokeless tobacco use rates vary by region in Alaska; the highest rates of smokeless tobacco use are found in Southwest Alaska (23%).⁷
- Nationally, boys are more likely than girls to use smokeless tobacco. However, smokeless tobacco use among Alaska Native girls is as high as that of boys of all race groups (16%).⁸
- The only safe, approved tobacco cessation aids that contain nicotine are FDA approved nicotine replacement products (nicotine gum, patches, lozenges, inhalers, nasal spray).⁹
- Youth are particularly vulnerable to trying new smokeless tobacco products, such as orbs, sticks and strips, that are candy-and-fruit flavored, marketed with attractive packaging, and easy to hide.¹⁰
- There is no sound scientific evidence demonstrating that use of smokeless tobacco is a feasible or effective method of quitting smoking. ¹¹

Background:

As smokefree workplace laws continue to be enacted across the country, at both the local and state level, the tobacco industry has been working overtime to not only promote the use of traditional smokeless tobacco products like chew, snus and snuff, but also to develop new products like orbs, sticks and strips that sustain nicotine addiction while being easier to use where smoking is not allowed.

Some smokeless tobacco manufacturers have marketed their products as a “harm reduction” option for smokers. In the case of the newly developed products, the industry’s false representation is that they contain fewer cancer-causing chemicals, and as such are less harmful.

However, according to the *Scientific Advisory Committee on Tobacco Products Regulation*, “Most smokeless tobacco products have constituents that are known to be hazardous, such as tobacco-specific nitrosamines, cadmium, and nicotine. Users of both smokeless and smoking products find tobacco cessation even more difficult to achieve than those who use only smokeless tobacco or only smoke. Tobacco manufacturers encourage use of smokeless tobacco products by smokers on occasions when they are not permitted to smoke and thereby promote individuals to adopt smokeless tobacco use in conjunction with continued smoking.”¹²

Because there is debate among tobacco prevention advocates and tobacco cessation experts on whether smokeless tobacco products are less harmful than combustible tobacco products (cigarettes, cigars, pipes), it is important for ATCA to take a public health position on the issue. As we look forward to a comprehensive statewide smokefree workplace law and the resulting restrictions on places where smokers can legally smoke, there is a real danger that smokers will consider smokeless tobacco as an alternate and/or falsely assumed safer nicotine delivery system to be used when smoking is not possible.

ATCA’s vision is for a tobacco-free Alaska, with the long term goal of “tobacco-free” being a core value in all Alaska cultures. As such, ATCA does not support promoting any tobacco product as either a harm reduction option or as a safe alternative to smoking.

¹ World Health Organization, 2004

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010

³ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2011

⁴ CDC Office on Smoking & Health, 2011

⁵ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2011

⁶ Myers, 2011

⁷ BRFSS, 2006-2008

⁸ YRBS, 2007 & 2009

⁹ Henley, SJ, et al., “Tobacco-related disease mortality among men who switched from cigarettes to spit tobacco,” *Tobacco Control* 16:22-28, 2007.

¹⁰ Myers, 2011

¹¹ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2011

¹² http://www.who.int/tobacco/sactob/recommendations/en/smokeless_en.pdf

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