

Fast Facts

American Indians & Tobacco Use

NOVEMBER 2010

Traditional Tobacco Uses

American Indians have used sacred tobacco for thousands of years. Many tribes consider tobacco a sacred gift from the Creator. The interpretation, symbolism and purposes of sacred tobacco are as varied in understanding as there are tribal nations. Tobacco can be used as an offering, sacrifice blessing, or medicine.

Tobacco Use and Cancer

Although many tribes consider tobacco a sacred gift and use it during religious ceremonies and as traditional medicine, the tobacco-related health problems they suffer are caused by use of commercial tobacco products, chronic cigarette smoking and spit tobacco use. Because of the cultural and geographic diversity of American Indians and Alaska Natives, tobacco use often varies widely by region or subgroup.¹

Nationally, and in Montana, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among American Indians and Alaska Natives.¹ In the years 2002-2006, the incidence rate of lung cancer among American Indian men in Montana was twice as high as among White men, and nearly twice as high among American Indian women as White women; mortality from lung cancer was greater among American Indian patients than among White patients. The higher incidence and mortality rates were associated with substantially higher smoking prevalence among American Indians in Montana.² In 2009, 46% of American Indian adults in Montana smoked, compared to 13% of White adults in Montana.³

More than 95% of cases of cancer of the lung and bronchus are attributable to cigarette smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke. Cigarette smoking also increases the risk of cancers of the sinuses, mouth, throat, liver, pancreas, stomach, kidneys, bladder, colon and rectum, and cervix. One third of all cancer deaths in Montana are caused by cigarettes.⁴

1. *Surgeon General's Report: Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups*, 1998
2. *Cancer Among American Indian Residents of Montana 2002-2006*, Montana Central Tumor Registry 2008
3. *2009 Montana Adult Tobacco Survey*, Montana Tobacco Use Prevention Program
4. *Smoking and Cancer*, Tobacco Surveillance Report, Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services, July 2008

Make the Call to Quit Tobacco Today!
Montana Tobacco Quit Line 1-800-QUIT-NOW

