

MMH Tobacco-Free Policy FAQ

Q: What does tobacco-free mean?

A: This policy is effective July 1, 2009. Tobacco use is defined as the burning of any type of tobacco product, as well as the use of oral tobacco products. The policy is applicable to everyone, including but not limited to employees, patients, physicians, visitors, vendors, contractors, students, volunteers, and anyone on hospital grounds/campus at Midland Memorial Hospital. Campus is defined as all properties that are owned, leased, and/or operated by Midland Memorial Hospital. This includes surrounding boundaries/sidewalks and all parking lots and parked cars.

Q: Why is MMH going tobacco-free?

- I. Improves health of staff, inpatients and outpatients by eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke
- II. Decreases employee tobacco use rates and related employee costs
- III. Strengthens the image of the hospital as a healthcare leader
- IV. Changes attitudes toward tobacco use within the community

We can ensure a healthy environment at MMH for our patients, their families, and our staff. We believe that we are setting a positive example for the community with genuine concern for everyone's health. It is a growing trend among hospitals nationwide to become completely tobacco-free and to eliminate designated smoking areas. Odessa Regional Medical Center and Medical Center Hospital will also become tobacco free campuses on July 1, 2009.

Q: Where on campus does the tobacco-free policy apply?

A: Everywhere. Tobacco use is prohibited on all areas of the campus, inside and outside, including inside cars that are parked on MMH property. Employees may choose to leave the campus to smoke while on authorized rest breaks or meal breaks, however, non-exempt employees are required to punch out when leaving MMH property. Managers are expected to enforce the break and lunch time limits, as well as the off-unit and time clock policies. Nearby businesses will be informed about the new policy and will be asked to contact human resources with any questions or concerns.

Q: Why are designated smoking areas being eliminated?

A: According to the American Cancer Society, data shows that designated areas do not protect nonsmokers from the effects of second hand smoke. Smoke can enter the non-designated areas through the building's air handling system. This exposes nonsmokers to the toxins contained within cigarette smoke. Secondhand smoke can worsen existing pulmonary symptoms in people with asthma and chronic bronchitis, increase eye irritation, sore throats, and nausea. As a health-care institution, we are committed not just to healing illness, but promoting wellness. Allowing smoking on our campus, even in designated areas, is not consistent with this commitment. MMH takes the firm position that it does not want visitors, patients or employees to smoke or be exposed to second-hand smoke while on our campus.

Q: Why was tobacco chosen rather than other health risks?

A: Smoking and other tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five deaths are related to smoking. Smoking has the additional feature of being harmful to those who are near the person engaging in the harmful behavior, through second-hand smoke.

Q: Isn't tobacco use a personal legal right?

A: No. We are not asking employees, visitors and patients to quit using tobacco, but to refrain from tobacco use while visiting or working at MMH. Recent court rulings maintain that tobacco users are not entitled to protection against discrimination as disabled persons. Generally, the Supreme Court requires a protected group to have an immutable characteristic determined solely by the accident of birth. Smoking is not an immutable characteristic because people are not born as smokers and smoking is a behavior that people can stop.

Q: If customer satisfaction is a top priority at MMH, isn't banning tobacco here going to anger visitors and patients who want to use tobacco?

A: The majority of our patients, visitors and staff are non-tobacco users, and they are entitled to smoke-free, litter-free areas surrounding MMH's entrances and other public spaces. Our patients and visitors are also entitled to interactions with employees without encountering the odors associated with smoking lingering on that employee's clothes and hair. Enforcement of this policy should be conducted in a firm but friendly manner. We are providing scripting so employees can feel more comfortable confronting people who are violating the policy in a diplomatic way.

Q: What kind of support is MMH providing to visitors who use tobacco?

A: Free counseling is available through the American Cancer Society Quitline at 1-877-YES-QUIT (1-877-937-7848) or if you are a New Mexico resident, you can call 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669). Nicotine patches can also be obtained via the Quitline. Additionally, our Gift Shop will begin selling nicotine gum.

Q: What kind of support is MMH providing to inpatients that use tobacco?

A: The hospital will make nicotine replacement therapy, in the form of nicotine patches, available upon request, with a physicians order.

Q: What if the doctor writes an order for a "smoke break" for an inpatient?

A: A physician's order to allow a patient to smoke will not be honored. The nursing staff should remind the physician of the tobacco-free campus policy.

Q: How will the tobacco-free policy be enforced? What if someone refuses to comply, and continues to use tobacco?

A: All employees are accountable and responsible for utilizing appropriate protocol for occasions when any person uses tobacco products on our property.

Visitors

Visitors may be unfamiliar with our policy and will be politely informed that tobacco is prohibited on our campus for the health of everyone. Please use the script on the Tobacco Free Campus information cards available at the nurse's stations and front auxiliary desks. Visitors will be advised to leave the campus to use tobacco. Politely inform visitors who refuse to comply with policy that it is likely that another employee will talk to them about the policy and ask them not to use tobacco. Employees should alert Security Personnel whenever necessary to assist in speaking with the visitor.

Patients

At the time of time of registration or pre-registration patients will be informed and given information about the MMH tobacco-free campus policy.