

# Graphic Health Warnings on Tobacco Packages

Fact sheet 3: Smoking causes mouth cancer

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Smoking can affect the health of your mouth and throat. As well as the obvious effects such as unsightly stains on your teeth and bad breath, smoking is the major cause of cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, pharynx, larynx (voice box), tongue, lips and salivary glands.<sup>1, 2</sup>

The longer you smoke, and the more you smoke, the greater the risk of these cancers.<sup>2</sup>

More than 80 percent of cancers of the mouth, nose and throat occur in people who smoke cigarettes, cigars or pipes.<sup>3</sup>

A total of 101 New Zealanders died from mouth cancer in 2004 and there were over 290 new cases of mouth cancer reported that year.<sup>4</sup>

Someone who has ever smoked is up to nine times more likely as a non-smoker to develop one of these cancers. Smokers of one pack a day are 16 times more likely than non-smokers to develop cancer of the larynx.<sup>5</sup>

Treatment for advanced cancer can involve surgery removing flesh and bone, radiation treatment, putting a hole in the neck (tracheostomy) to aid breathing or putting a feeding tube into the stomach.<sup>6</sup>

Smoking can also lead to gum disease (periodontal disease) and increased tartar on the teeth, which harbours plaque. This can cause serious destruction of the tissues around the teeth, which can result in tooth loss as well as pain. Smoking can also delay the healing of any injured tissues in the mouth, such as ulcers, or following oral surgery.<sup>7</sup>

Quitting smoking can significantly reduce your risk of oral cancer and improve your dental health.

Five years after you quit smoking completely the risk of cancers of the mouth, throat and oesophagus are halved and it continues to decline over time.<sup>8</sup>

Want to quit smoking? The most important thing is to make a quit attempt. For help, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, quit smoking provider or call the Quitline on 0800 778 778 or visit The Quit Group web site at [www.quit.org.nz](http://www.quit.org.nz)

The pictures below were supplied by doctors at Auckland City Hospital and are of real life New Zealand patients with mouth cancer attributable to smoking.



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Sources:

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. 2004. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: what it means to you*. US Department of Health and Human Services, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004. [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_2004/00\\_pdfs/SGR2004\\_Whatitmeanstoyou.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2004/00_pdfs/SGR2004_Whatitmeanstoyou.pdf) (accessed 12/02/08)

<sup>2</sup> American Council on Science and Health. 2003. *Cigarettes: What the warning label doesn't tell you*. Second edition. New York, American Council on Science and Health, 2003. [http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.206/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.206/pub_detail.asp) (accessed 11/02/08)

<sup>3</sup> The Cancer Council Victoria. 2007. *Cancers of the Mouth, Nose and Throat*. July, 2007. [http://www.cancervic.org.au/downloads/mouth\\_nose\\_throat\\_cancer/Cancer\\_mouth\\_nose\\_throat\\_07.pdf](http://www.cancervic.org.au/downloads/mouth_nose_throat_cancer/Cancer_mouth_nose_throat_07.pdf) (accessed 08/02/08)

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Health: New Zealand Health Information Service. 2004. *Cancer: New Registrations and Deaths 2004*. Wellington, 2007. <http://www2.nzhis.govt.nz/publications/Cancer04.pdf> (accessed 08/02/08)

<sup>5</sup> Holman & Armstrong et al. (1990). *The quantification of drug caused morbidity and mortality in Australia 1988*. Canberra: AGPS.

<sup>6</sup> American Cancer Society. 2007. *Oral Cavity & Oropharyngeal Cancer Detailed Guide*. [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI\\_2\\_4\\_7x\\_CRC\\_Oral\\_Cavity\\_and\\_Oropharyngeal\\_cancer\\_PDF.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_4_7x_CRC_Oral_Cavity_and_Oropharyngeal_cancer_PDF.asp) (accessed 11/02/08)

<sup>7</sup> American Council on Science and Health. 2003. *Cigarettes: What the warning label doesn't tell you*. Second edition. New York, American Council on Science and Health, 2003. [http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.206/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.206/pub_detail.asp) (accessed 11/02/08)

<sup>8</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. 2004. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: A report of the Surgeon General*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004. [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/sgr\\_2004/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/sgr_2004/index.htm) (accessed 11/02/08)