

Stop-smoking lines flooded as tobacco tax rises

March 31 2009

(AP) -- Calling your state stop-smoking hot line for help kicking the habit? Expect a wait: Smokers are flooding the lines in a panic over an increase in the tobacco tax.

Denver-based National Jewish Health received triple the usual number of calls Monday for a March day to quit lines it runs in six states: Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Montana, New Mexico and Ohio.

The calls - 2,317 on Monday - had steadily increased all month as [smokers](#) began dealing with a big price hit in a sour economy. Not only does the per-pack federal tax climb from 39 cents to \$1.01 on Wednesday, but the major cigarette makers raised prices several weeks ago in anticipation.

Quit lines around the country are feeling the surge, according to an informal survey by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids that found a missed opportunity as cash-strapped states struggled to meet demand.

Michigan's quit line itself had to quit - working, that is. It ran out of money in mid-March after logging more than 65,000 callers in five days. Besides counseling and tips, Michigan's hot line offered free [nicotine](#) patches, gum or lozenges. The giveaway program in 2008 generated only about 20,000 calls in six weeks, the campaign noted.

Arkansas quit general advertising of the quit line to keep up with calls that rose from about 500 a week in January to more than 2,000 a week in

mid-March, the campaign said. And Indiana and Oklahoma were receiving record-level weekly calls.

Price surges typically spur would-be quitters to take the plunge. Not all will be successful. The tobacco-free kids group estimates that about 1 million adults will quit as a result of the tax increase.

Consumers can dial 1-800-QUIT-NOW to be directed to their state hot lines.

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids:

<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/index.php>

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