

After 25 years, World No Tobacco Day is making an impact

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May 31 marks the 25th anniversary of World No Tobacco Day, but does the day really inspire anyone to think about quitting smoking? Yes it does, according to a new study led by investigators from the Informatics Program at Children's Hospital Boston and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. For the study, the research team monitored news promoting cessation and Internet search queries indicative of cessation for six years in seven Latin American nations. Cessation news coverage and Internet search queries for cessation peaked on World No Tobacco Day, increasing as much as 83 percent and 84 percent compared to a typical day, respectively. Their findings appear in the May/June issue of *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

"After 25 years we didn't know if World No Tobacco Day was having a significant [public health](#) impact," said John W. Ayers, lead author of the study, Children's Hospital faculty member and recent graduate of the Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Frankly, given the proliferation of awareness days, we were surprised to find large spikes pointing to interest in cessation."

Senior analyst and Bloomberg doctoral candidate Benjamin Althouse noted, "We generally think of New Year's Day as the peak time when media encourages quitting and smokers want to quit. World No Tobacco Day spikes, however, often outsized New Year's increases, like a second-chance quitting resolution."

"People who live in low-and middle-income countries comprise a

majority of the deaths from the global tobacco epidemic. Our study provides initial evidence that World No Tobacco Day encourages cessation awareness and cessation interest in these countries," said Joanna Cohen, PhD, who leads the Bloomberg School's Institute for Global Tobacco Control. "The majority of smokers do want to quit, and World No Tobacco Day is an effective reminder and inspiration."

"Almost 6 million people die each year from tobacco including 600,000 from [second-hand smoke](#). Anything that helps people quit tobacco is a life-saver," said Douglas Bettcher, director of WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative. "This research encourages all of us to continue the long fight against tobacco. But we should never let down our guard against the tobacco industry's devious tactics to undo the public health gains we have been able to make."

The authors note these increases have potentially large health implications. Jon-Patrick Allem, study coauthor and USC Keck Medicine affiliate said, "To otherwise achieve these kinds of increases, countries would have to raise cigarette taxes 2.8 percent every year; this is likely undoable year in and year out, unlike the way World No Tobacco Day delivers.

Daniel Ford, professor of Epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Kurt Ribisl, professor of Public Health at UNC's Gillings Global School of Public Health, also contributed to the published report.

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