

# CDC launching graphic anti-smoking ad campaign

15 March 2012, By MIKE STOBBE , AP Medical Writer



This image provided on Wednesday, March 14, 2012 by the Centers for Disease Control shows Shawn Wright who had a tracheotomy after being diagnosed with head and neck cancer. Tobacco taxes and smoking bans haven't budged the U.S. smoking rate in years. Now the government is trying to shock smokers into quitting with a graphic nationwide advertising campaign. (AP Photo/Centers for Disease Control)

(AP) -- Tobacco taxes and smoking bans haven't budged the U.S. smoking rate in years. Now the government is trying to shock smokers into quitting with a graphic nationwide advertising campaign.

The billboards and print, radio and TV ads show people whose smoking resulted in heart surgery, a tracheotomy, lost limbs or paralysis. The \$54 million campaign is the largest and starkest anti-smoking push by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and its first national advertising effort.

The agency is hoping the spots, which begin Monday, will persuade as many as 50,000 Americans to stop smoking.

"This is incredibly important. It's not every day we release something that will save thousands of lives," CDC Director Dr. Thomas Frieden said in a telephone interview.

That bold prediction is based on earlier research that found aggressive anti-smoking campaigns using hard-hitting images sometimes led to decreases in smoking. After decades of decline, the U.S. smoking rate has stalled at about 20 percent in recent years.

Advocates say it's important to jolt a weary public that has been listening to government warnings about the dangers of smoking for nearly 50 years.

"There is an urgent need for this media campaign," Matthew Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said in a statement.

The CDC was set to announce the three-month campaign on Thursday.

One of the print ads features Shawn Wright from Washington state who had a tracheotomy after being diagnosed with [head and neck cancer](#) four years ago. The ad shows the 50-year-old shaving, his razor moving down toward a red gaping hole at the base of his neck that he uses to speak and breathe.

An advertising firm, Arnold Worldwide, found Wright and about a dozen others who developed cancer or other health problems after [smoking](#) for the ads.

Federal health agencies have gradually embraced graphic anti-smoking imagery. Last year, the [Food and Drug Administration](#) approved nine images to be displayed on cigarette packages. Among them were a man exhaling cigarette smoke through a [tracheotomy](#) hole in his throat, and a diseased mouth with what appear to be cancerous lesions.

Last month, a federal judge blocked the

requirement that tobacco companies put the images on their packages, saying it was unconstitutional.

Graphic ads are meant to create an image so striking that smokers and would-be smokers will think of it whenever they have an urge to buy a pack of cigarettes, said Glenn Leshner, a University of Missouri researcher who has studied the effectiveness of anti-smoking ads.

Leshner and his colleagues found that some ads are so disturbing that people reacted by turning away from the message rather than listening. So while spots can shock viewers into paying attention, they also have to encourage people that quitting is possible, he said.

The CDC [campaign](#) includes information on a national quit line and offers advice on how to kick the habit, CDC officials said.

**More information:** CDC:

<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/>

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