

# ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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### **Oneida County Working to Make Every Day Tobacco Free**

Today is *World No Tobacco Day* and Oneida County is doing its part to decrease smoking rates.

“Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the nation, and we have been working very hard to decrease tobacco-related illness and the dangers of secondhand smoke,” said Oneida County Director of Health Phyllis D. Ellis BSN, MS, F.A.C.H.E. “We’ve made some strides, but we would like to make every day No Tobacco Day.”

According to the most recent New York State Department of Health data, the number of adult smokers in Oneida County decreased from 22 percent in 2013 to 14.6 percent in 2016, well under the 17 percent nationwide average and in line with the statewide average of 14.1 percent.

“We are proud of our efforts to discourage tobacco use and encourage healthier lifestyles,” said Ellis. “Oneida County’s smoking rate has gone from one of the highest in the Central New York region to the lowest.”

Smoking increases the risk for serious health problems, chronic disease and death. According to the American Heart Association, more than one-third of deaths from coronary disease can be attributed to smoking and second-hand smoke.

As of January 1, 2018, the use of tobacco products or e-devices on any property owned or leased by Oneida County is prohibited. Well in advance of the new law, the county put into place a multi-step plan to inform and educate employees about the benefits of working and living smoke free, including fitness and wellness activities and tips, and quit smoking assistance and referrals.

According to a 2018 study by Bridges Tobacco Prevention of Oneida, Herkimer and Madison Counties, 78 percent of Oneida County residents favor a policy prohibiting smoking in the entrances of public buildings and workplaces. Another 55 percent of Oneida County residents favor prohibiting smoking in outdoor public places such as beaches and parks.

The Oneida County Health Department offers free smoking cessation classes to all county residents in partnership with Mohawk Valley Health System and Rome Memorial Hospital, and offers referrals and materials from the New York State Smoker’s Quitline (1-866-NY-QUITS).

Oneida County also supports New York State Legislation, known as Tobacco 21, which would raise the legal sales for all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, to 21 years of age. The legislation has passed both the State Senate and Assembly and is waiting the Governor’s signature into law.

“Raising the legal age, especially for e-cigarettes which we know has become an epidemic among middle and high schoolers, will help stop the steady flow of these products from getting into the hands of younger and younger teens,” said Ellis. “Children are still inhaling nicotine into their lungs, and they are becoming addicted to that nicotine, which very often leads to becoming a traditional smoker or moving on to more harmful substances. When we talk about the dangers of tobacco and nicotine, e-cigarettes and vaping are a critical component.”

Each year, the World Health Organization holds World No Tobacco Day on May 31 to spread awareness about the risks of tobacco use and how we can make the world tobacco free. Roughly 6 million people die from tobacco-related ailments every year. Other side-effects of smoking include cost, with the average smoker spending approximately \$4,000 on cigarettes annually and second-hand smoke, which causes more than 600,00 deaths a year, 28 percent of which are children.

The Oneida County Health Department will offer another session of Quit Smoking classes beginning July 10<sup>th</sup> at MVHS St. Elizabeth Campus. For more information or to register, call (315) 798-6400.