



NOTE TO MEDIA: Please contact us if you would like to connect with any of the experts for a follow-up interview. This story and additional reports are available at our Online News Room by visiting <https://www.nysmokefree.com/NewsRoom>.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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- *COVID-19 heightens stress, which creates an added challenge for smokers to quit and former smokers to stay quit*
- *Although New York State residents who report having at least one mental health condition tend to smoke more, most smokers want to quit*
- *The Quitline's Quit Coaches can provide support and advice to help manage stress while quitting or getting back on track to stay quit*

MENTAL HEALTH MONTH HAS NEW MEANING FOR CURRENT AND FORMER SMOKERS IN 2020

As the COVID-19 pandemic strains everyone's mental health, the New York State Smokers' Quitline advocates tobacco-free living

BUFFALO, N.Y. – May 14, 2020 – May is Mental Health Awareness Month, which has heightened significance this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The New York State Smokers' Quitline (Quitline) encourages all state residents to maintain or transition to tobacco-free living for added happiness and health.

Experts agree. According to Dr. Jennifer Hydeman, assistant professor of oncology and medical psychologist at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, N.Y., healthy

activities will help people feel centered. **“Social distancing can magnify feelings of isolation,** so it’s important to maintain social connections, whether online or on the phone,” she said. “This is a time to focus on mindfulness and self-care, as well as being intentional and structured with each day.”

[According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), **approximately 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. has some form of behavioral health condition, and these adults consume almost 40% of all cigarettes smoked by adults.** These trends also apply to New York State, as 39 percent of those who accessed the [Quitline’s services in 2019](#) reported having at least one underlying mental health condition.

“I see a high prevalence of patients with mental health conditions who also smoke,” said Christine Harrington, DNP, APRN, PMHNP-BC, NEA-BC, psychiatric nurse practitioner and deputy director of operations for outpatient services with Hutchings Psychiatric Center in Syracuse, N.Y. Hutchings is part of the New York State Office of Mental Health, which advocates the importance of smoking cessation among its nearly 15,000 statewide employees and regularly partners with the Quitline to provide referrals for tobacco- and nicotine-dependent patients. **“Sometimes, these patients mistakenly think smoking cigarettes calms them down and improves underlying mental health conditions,”** said Harrington. “The truth is, smoking can complicate these conditions and related treatment medications. Nicotine addiction further exacerbates feelings such as the jitters and lack of self-control.”

The good news is those managing one or more mental health conditions can quit. Although the COVID-19 pandemic may heighten feelings of anxiety among current and former smokers, **trained Quit Coaches with the Quitline have experience helping those with mental health conditions to create a tailored quit-plan.**

“It’s always a good idea to reach out to as many resources as possible when trying to quit or stay quit, including healthcare professionals and the Quitline,” said Paula Celestino, director of client relations and outreach for the Quitline. “Some who have called the Quitline in recent weeks acknowledged now being an opportune time to quit – especially since they recognize they need optimal respiratory health to fight COVID-19. Our Quit Coaches understand the sensitive nature of mental health, which can be an added layer when it comes to charting an appropriate course of action for successful outcomes. **The important thing, especially during this time, is to have a connection for help – and the Quitline provides that.**”

Quit Coaches are available seven days a week beginning at 9 a.m. at 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487). The Quitline also recommends healthcare professionals get connected to the Quitline's [Patient Referral Program](#) to provide their tobacco-using patients added support, including a personalized quit-plan. Nearly all Quitline participants are eligible to receive a starter kit of nicotine replacement therapy with self-help materials.

About the New York State Smokers' Quitline

The New York State Smokers' Quitline is a service of the New York State Department of Health and based at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo, N.Y. It is one of the first and busiest state quitlines in the nation and has responded to nearly 3 million calls since it began operating in 2000. The Quitline encourages nicotine users to talk with their healthcare professionals and access available Medicaid or health insurance benefits for stop-smoking medications. All New York State residents can call **1-866-NY-QUITS** (1-866-697-8487) for coaching and resources, free of charge, seven days a week beginning at 9 a.m. Visit www.nysmokefree.com for more information.

About Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center

Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center is a community united by the drive to eliminate cancer's grip on humanity by unlocking its secrets through personalized approaches and unleashing the healing power of hope. Founded by Dr. Roswell Park in 1898, it is the only National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center in Upstate New York. Learn more at www.roswellpark.org, or contact us at 1-800-ROSWELL (1-800-767-9355) or ASKRoswell@roswellpark.org.

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