

Support cigarette tax

Editor, The Daily News:

As a physician and medical director, I urge our state leaders to support Governor Jim Doyle's proposal to raise cigarette prices to help keep children from smoking, encourage smokers to quit, and to treat smokers who get sick.

Half of the children who start smoking will become addicted. Over their shortened lives, they will cough up phlegm daily and become increasingly breathless. One third will die from cancer, heart disease and emphysema.

Treating smokers who get sick costs taxpayers approximately half billion dollars a year, statewide. Reducing smoking will pay enormous dividends for them, their children, taxpayers and the health care system.

Raising the cost of cigarettes is a simple, effective policy.

Based on other states, raising the tobacco tax \$1.25 will keep 84,000 children from smoking. It will also effectively encourage cessation. The tax increase will help 38,000 adult smokers quit.

For my pregnant patients who smoked, I've seen tragic outcomes for their babies, including low birth weights and fetal death. Parents and grandparents who smoke die from heart disease, lung disease and cancer.

Business people should support the tobacco tax, too. It costs about \$2 billion dollars a year in Wisconsin to treat smokers who get sick from tobacco, much of it paid by businesses that provide health insurance for employees.

It's time to support a cigarette tax increase.

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Note : Letters to the Editor is updated once a week, every Wednesday.