

## DELIVERING CARE

# Public health concerns prompt physician policy

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Troy Parks  
Staff Writer  
AMA Wire

[@Troy\\_AMAWire](#)

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On the last day of the 2016 AMA Interim Meeting, delegates adopted several policies to promote the health of the nation. Public health issues addressed include distracted driving, dangerous coal-tar sealcoats and smoking among youth.

### Stopping distracted driving

If you're not using your cell phone while driving, then you've seen the billboard warnings not to text and drive. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each day in the U.S., [eight people are killed and 1,161 injured](#) in crashes that involve a distracted driver. The U.S. Department of Transportation reports that the [percentage of drivers visibly manipulating handheld devices is on the rise](#).

Fourteen states and the District of Columbia already have laws in place banning hand-held cell phone use and texting. In an effort to protect the safety of all those on or near the roadways across the country, the AMA Tuesday adopted policy to develop model state legislation to limit cell phone use to hands-free only while driving.

### Graphic cigarette packaging labels

A recent study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine suggests raising the minimum legal purchase age of tobacco products to 21 could result in a 12-percent decrease in smoking prevalence amongst the nation's youth.

The AMA adopted policies reaffirming its longtime commitment to preventing tobacco use among youth. The policies ask the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to require tobacco companies to add color, graphic warning labels to all cigarette packages and call for raising the minimum legal purchase age of all tobacco products to 21.

"As part of the AMA's effort to improve the health of the nation, the policies adopted today further our longtime commitment to keeping all harmful tobacco products out of the hands of young people," said AMA Board Member William E. Kobler, MD. "We also call on the [FDA] to act now to submit a new proposed rule that would require all cigarette packages to include graphic warning labels."

### Gender differences and Alzheimer's disease

Five million seniors suffer from Alzheimer's in the U.S. and two-thirds of those seniors are women, according to the Alzheimer's Association. And, women in their 60s are 17.2 percent more likely to

develop Alzheimer's disease over the rest of their lives compared to the 9.3 percent likelihood of developing breast cancer.

A survey conducted by the [Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative](#) suggests that dementia in women with early memory problems progresses significantly faster than in men. Understanding these sex differences may lead to better diagnostic procedures and experimental treatment targets in women.

The AMA adopted policy to support increased awareness of the sex and gender differences in incidence and etiology of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias and to encourage increased enrollment in clinical trials to better identify sex differences in incidence and progression to advance a treatment and cure of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia.

### **Banning dangerous coal-tar sealcoats**

Studies show that individuals with lifelong exposure to coal-tar sealcoat-treated pavements and playgrounds have a 38-fold higher risk of cancer. Already, Washington, Minnesota, Washington, D.C., and counties, townships and municipalities in many other states, including Michigan, have banned the use of coal-tar sealcoats. Alternatives to coal-tar-based sealcoats, including asphalt, acrylic or latex sealcoats, have low or no polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) and are available at a similar cost.

The AMA adopted new policy aimed at reducing or ending the use of common coal-tar-based sealcoats that are used and applied on pavement and playgrounds across the country. The new policy advocates for legislation either to ban the use of pavement sealcoats containing PAHs or to

require the use of sealcoat products with minimal PAH. According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, PAH compounds have been proven to be carcinogenic, mutagenic and teratogenic to humans.

“Whether they are sending their children to a playground or repairing a driveway, Americans are potentially being exposed to harmful carcinogens in coal-tar-based sealcoats,” said AMA Board member Albert J. Osbahr III, MD. “Even if one’s exposure is limited, as sealcoats erode over time, PAHs leach into the water, soil and air, finding their way into sediment and eventually into aquatic wildlife. We must take action to either eliminate the use of PAH altogether or dramatically reduce its concentration in coal-tar sealcoats.”

### Promoting Teen Health Week

About 17 percent of the nation’s children are obese and that rate has remained consistent over the past ten years, according to [“The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America.”](#) Healthy behaviors are initiated in adolescence and occur because teenagers are not exposed to positive activities that nurture better health choices.

Several observances already exist for specific teen health issues including Teen Dating Violence Prevention Month, Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month and Youth Violence Prevention Week.

The AMA Tuesday adopted policy to promote the week dedicated to the health of our nation’s teenagers and to encourage state medical associations and specialty medical associations to join these efforts to promote and participate in Teen Health Week, which will occur Jan. 9-13.

## Women and PrEP

According to the CDC, women accounted for 19 percent of new HIV infections in the U.S. in 2014, and African American women account for 64 percent of women living with the disease.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medications have been proven to significantly reduce the chances of HIV infection in high-risk populations. Yet, physicians are prescribing it in men more often than women.

The AMA adopted policy supporting awareness and education about the benefits of PrEP use in women and minorities.

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**Submitted by coaltarfreeamerica on Friday,  
November 18, 2016 - 13:53**

Thank you for your new policy about coal tar pavement sealers. Most troubling is the continued use of this product at schools and medical facilities. I wrote about one cancer survivor who was "fighting mad" about crossing a coal tar sealed lot on his way for cancer treatments.

<https://coaltarfreeamerica.blogspot.com/2015/05/cancer-survivor-fighting-mad-about-mo.html> Could you please tell me or send me the complete text of the new coal tar sealer policy? You can send it to coaltarfreeamerica at gmail.com. Thank you. Tom Ennis

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The AMA promotes the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health.



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