



Prevention Programs

Stop Smoking Before Surgery (SSBS)



“Some health-care providers have questioned whether smokers should be given a lower priority on surgical waiting lists if they do not agree to ‘fast’ from smoking for at least eight weeks prior to surgery.”

Smokers are at greater risk of surgical complications than non-smokers. It takes longer for their surgical wounds to heal and those wounds are more likely to become infected. They have a higher chance of developing lung and chest infections. Furthermore, smokers have average hospital stays after surgery that are longer than non-smokers.

However, patients who quit smoking at least eight weeks before surgery fare better after surgery than smokers who continue to use tobacco. These patients also experience fewer complications when under anaesthesia during surgery. Finally, because these patients are in a situation where the symptoms of withdrawal may be lessened, their chances increase for long-term success with smoking cessation.

That’s why the Prevention Programs developed *Stop Smoking Before Surgery* (SSBS), an intervention program for patients on surgical waiting lists that is implemented in partnership with Health Authorities and other stakeholders around British Columbia. In partnership, SSBS delivers resources—such as referrals to provincial and regional smoking cessation programs—to

tobacco users during the all-important time period when they are getting ready to undergo surgery.

The evidence is clear that quitting eight weeks before surgery reduces all risks of smoking-related operative complications. So timing is crucial. That’s why it’s so important to have the information available at critical delivery points before the surgery date—such as in pre-operative packages, in physician’s offices for delivery at time of surgery booking, in dentist’s offices, at pharmacies, and in other outlets.

This means that more patients will learn the health benefits of stopping smoking when it will have maximum effect—and that may start many smokers on the way to quitting for good. Not only is *Stop Smoking Before Surgery* good for patients, but it also provides cost avoidance for health-care providers through reduced complications and hospital stays.

In addition to SSBS, other tobacco-cessation training and resources for both health-care professionals and non health-care professionals are available at tobaccoed.org.