



Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

July 11, 2019

Colonel Rodney S. Gonzalez
Medical Corps, United States Army
Director, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center
8901 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20889

Dear Colonel Gonzalez:

I have recently been told that Walter Reed still allows smoking on its grounds, despite the fact that the VA has set the healthy example by banning all smoking and vaping from its hospitals. If this is true about Walter Reed, I am both surprised and disappointed, as we know unequivocally what smoking does to one's health and to military readiness.

You as a physician fully understand the harm that smoking does to our military. According to a former Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) writing in an official memorandum several years ago, 175,000 active duty military smokers will die from tobacco use. This is a terrible waste of life and can be stopped or decreased.

If I was misinformed and Walter Reed is actually smoke-free, then I commend you and apologize for taking up your time. If smoking is still allowed on the WRNMMC campus, then I ask that you end it now, before more harm is done.

Sincerely,

Col. James T. Currie, USA (ret.)
Executive Director



VA bans smoking, vaping at its hospitals

BY REBECCA KLAR - 06/11/19 10:53 AM EDT [88](#)

760

[by](#)



© Getty Images

Smoking and vaping will no longer be allowed at Veterans Affairs (VA) health care centers across the country starting in October, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced Tuesday.

Historically, permitted designated smoking areas were available at VA facilities. The new policy will limit smoking of all kinds, including cigarettes and electronic vape pens.

In announcing the policy change, the VA cited growing evidence that smoke exposure causes significant medical risks.

The ban is popular among VA hospital officials, according to the announcement. A recent VA survey found about 85 percent of facility leadership support smoke-free campuses.

"We are not alone in recognizing the importance of creating a smoke-free campus," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie in the release. "As of 2014, 4,000 health care facilities and four national health care systems in the U.S. have implemented smoke-free grounds."

The new policy will pertain to patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors.

"This policy change coincides with additional VHA efforts to help us become the provider of choice for Veterans and the reason why Veterans will ChooseVA," Wilkie said.

TAGS UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ROBERT WILKIE ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES HEALTH