Custer County Health Department
Creating a State of Health

Public Health Lab Funding and Establishment of Cigarette Fee Highlight Health Initiatives Approved by the Legislature

The health of Oklahomans will benefit from two measures approved by the 2017 session of the legislature. Legislators approved the issuance of bonds for the construction of a new Public Health Laboratory (PHL) and also approved establishing a $1.50 fee charged to wholesalers who distribute cigarettes.

By passing the bill to provide funding for the lab, legislators helped prevent the possibility of the current 45-year old facility losing accreditation. Bonding authority will fund construction of a modern-designed laboratory and allow the PHL to be more efficient and effective at testing. Construction of the new laboratory is expected to be completed by 2019 on state-owned property south of the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) central office in Oklahoma City.

The PHL provides vital laboratory testing that protects the public against the spread of infectious disease and ensures newborns can thrive through early identification of genetic disorders. Each year, the PHL processes more than 700,000 tests for various illnesses and more than 53,000 newborns are screened for inherited disorders.

Establishing the fee on cigarettes will save the state $1.2 billion dollars in long term health costs and prevent 16,700 lives from ending prematurely due to smoking-related health costs. In addition, it will stop 28,200 children from becoming adult smokers and result in more than 30,000 current smokers who choose to quit rather than pay the new fee. Governor Mary Fallin has signed the legislation and the fee will go into law in 90 days.

"We are grateful to the House, Senate and Governor Fallin for realizing the critical need for this focus on health issues," said OSDH Commissioner and HHS Cabinet Secretary Dr. Terry Cline. "We also recognize that it was a difficult budget year and that it took incredible courage to recognize that these issues could not be postponed any longer."

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