

Non-Nicotine Hiring Policy FAQ's

When did this policy go into effect?

St. Luke's University Health Network began screening all applicants for nicotine on May 1, 2010.

Is this policy for all Network entities?

Yes, with the exception of New Jersey-based positions, which may include the Warren Campus and any NJ-based physician practices.

Is screening for nicotine use legal?

Yes, in Pennsylvania. Users of nicotine are not in a legally protected class. Non-nicotine hiring policies are legal in 20 states including Pennsylvania. In 1987 a Federal Appeals Court ruled that smokers are not a "protected class" entitled to special legal protections and that courts need no further rationale than the Surgeon General's warning on cigarette cartons: Cigarette smoking is hazardous to your health.

How are applicants tested for nicotine?

The testing is part of the urine drug screen done at the time of the pre-employment physical. Nicotine test results are on a pass/fail basis.

If an applicant fails the screening for nicotine, can he/she reapply for employment at St. Luke's? If so, when?

Yes. Applicants can re-apply six months after they have failed the nicotine screen.

Why the focus on smokers?

The health risks and related costs associated with nicotine use have caused St. Luke's to focus on this in its initiative to have a healthier workforce and to contain the costs of providing health care benefits to its employees and their dependents.

What could cause a positive nicotine result on the screening?

Any substance that contains nicotine will produce a positive result. In addition to cigarettes, this would include chewing tobacco, snuff, nicotine patch, nicotine gum, cigars, etc.

Can individuals have a re-test?

No. Only individuals who produce a dilute urine sample are retested as part of the pre-employment screening process. Retesting must be done within 24 hours of the original sample being given. If a second sample is also dilute, the job offer is rescinded.

Does second hand smoke produce a positive result?

When testing for nicotine, the lab has built in levels that would take into account the possibility of second hand smoke. Therefore, a positive result will mean the individual who tested positive is a nicotine user.

If a current employee terminates employment with St. Luke's and then re-applies, will they be subject to the new screening?

Yes, anyone completing the pre-employment physical process after May 1, 2010 for Pennsylvania-based positions will be tested for nicotine.

Will any smoking cessation resources be provided to the applicants that fail the screening?

Yes, a listing of smoking cessation resources will be provided to any applicant who tests positive for nicotine.

How long does nicotine stay in your system?

The length of time nicotine stays in the system varies. Some of the variables include length of time a person has been smoking, number of cigarettes smoked, type of cigarette, depth and duration of inhalation, difference in the way each person's body breaks down the nicotine, etc. Nicotine can stay in the system up to 30 days or more. It can even take weeks longer until the nicotine is depleted from the fat in the body.

How much do I have to smoke/chew in order to test positive?

Smoking one cigarette can produce a positive result depending on when the urine sample is taken.

Why is St. Luke's doing this?

St. Luke's is committed to having a healthier workforce and containing healthcare expenses.