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Doctor: Snuff, chewing tobacco also risky

CHICAGO (AP) — Cigarette and cigar smokers who switch to chewing tobacco or snuff in the hopes of avoiding lung cancer may instead be risking dangerous sores in their mouths and throats, a doctor says.

Indeed, snuff and chewing tobacco may prove even more dangerous than cigarette smoking to the delicate linings of the mouth and esophagus, according to Dr. Alan Blum, a family physician specializing in community health here.

Blum's warning was printed in the July 11 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* as a response to a question from a journal reader. He served as an AMA fellow, a sort of resident expert, for this issue of the magazine.

In the same issue, a major article discussed so-called "smokeless tobacco" products and their possible usefulness in weaning nicotine addicts from cigarette habits.

Some researchers believe a nicotine gum, manufactured in Sweden, may help smokers break the habit. The article said previous research showed the gum increases nicotine levels in the blood near to those produced by cigarettes, thereby satisfying some of the craving for cigarettes.

But the gum "reputedly tastes somewhat vile" and is known to

produce such side effects as hiccups, nausea, dizziness and a burning sensation at the back of the throat, the article said.

Blum wrote that snuff can cause gum disease, tooth abrasion and white patches on the throat which can become cancerous. He also said chewing tobacco can lead to cancer of the mouth, throat and digestive tract.

Blum said he based his warnings on various research studies, including one project involving more than 2,000 patients in India who used chewing tobacco, a product he conceded may contain different ingredients than American tobaccos.

Chewing tobacco has been a longtime favorite of baseball players. Pittsburgh Pirates manager Chuck Tanner switched from cigars to chewing tobacco. Boston Red Sox catcher Carlton Fisk makes commercials for one brand.

Other ballplayers favor snuff. It's cleaner than chewing tobacco, they don't have to spit and it apparently gives as much satisfaction.

Both products are being advertised by some manufacturers as safe alternatives to smoking, and they are gaining popularity.

Snuff-dipping — placing pulverized tobacco between the gum and cheek — reportedly is on the increase among Southern youths, according to a recent article in the

New England *Journal of Medicine*.

And the U.S. Department of Agriculture noted a 6 percent increase in tobacco chewing recently, Blum said.

A spokesman for the Smokeless Tobacco Council, a trade group which represents some tobacco

companies, denied that chewing or dipping is harmful.

"Smokeless tobacco has not been found scientifically as a cause of any oral lesion in humans including cancer, with respect to any study cited," said Gerry Gilmartin, executive vice president of the group.

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