

QA Matters: Tobacco Use Smoking Status

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The Vermont Cancer Registry (VCR) currently requires the reporting of 157 data items as part of the national data set administered by the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries (NAACCR). These data items capture information about cancer diagnosis, including demographics, stage, treatment, and outcomes, and form the foundation of a complete abstract.

This brief highlights [NAACCR Data Item #334, Tobacco Use Smoking Status](#).

Key Points

- **Tobacco Use Smoking Status has been collected by VCR for cases diagnosed in 2022 and later.**
- **Tobacco Use Smoking Status is an NPCR-required data item when available.**
- **Smoking status at diagnosis supports cancer control activities, research, and outcome analyses.**
- **Tobacco Use Smoking Status is not the same as general tobacco use.**
- **Smoking status codes should be supported by appropriate text documentation.**

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact Linda.Bloschies@vermont.gov.

Why This Matters

Tobacco Use Smoking Status is a data item required by the National Program of Cancer Registries (NPCR), when available, and VCR began collecting this information for cases diagnosed in 2022.

As the amount of collected data continues to grow, VCR and its public health partners are increasingly able to use this information to support analysis, surveillance, and cancer control activities. Smoking status at diagnosis is important for understanding how tobacco use affects cancer risk, prognosis, treatment effectiveness, and outcomes.

While this data item is not considered a critical data item, we encourage registrars to capture the information whenever it is documented in the medical record.



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Understanding Tobacco Use Smoking Status

Smoking history is routinely collected during clinical encounters and is often documented in the patient's medical record. Tobacco Use Smoking Status captures cigarette, cigar, and pipe smoking history at the time of diagnosis.

As with all coded data items, the assigned code should be supported by appropriate documentation in the text fields.

Tobacco Use Smoking Status Codes

Code 0 – Never smoker

Code 1 – Current smoker

Code 2 – Former smoker

Code 3 – Smoker, current status unknown

Code 9 – Unknown if ever smoked

Coding Guidance

- **Record cigarette, cigar, and/or pipe use only.**
- Smoking history may be documented in sections such as the Nursing Interview Guide, Flow Chart, Vital Stats, Nursing Assessment, or other available sources within the hospital or physician office record.
- **Code 1 (Current smoker)** if the medical record indicates the patient quit smoking within 30 days prior to diagnosis, as patients may have quit due to symptoms leading up to the cancer diagnosis.
- **Code 2 (Former smoker)** if the patient quit smoking 31 or more days prior to diagnosis.
- **Code 3 (Smoker, current status unknown)** may be used when the record indicates smoking but does not clarify whether the patient is a current or former smoker. For example, the medical record documents “Yes” for smoking without further information.
- **Code 9 (Unknown if ever smoked)** should be used rather than **Code 0 (Never smoker)** if the record only states “No tobacco use,” if smoking status is not documented, or if the specific smoking method (cigarette, pipe, or cigar) cannot be verified.

Common Coding Pitfalls

- Do not include marijuana use.
- Do not include chewing tobacco or other smokeless tobacco products.
- Do not include e-cigarettes or vaping devices.

- **Do not assume that "No tobacco use" means Never Smoker (Code 0).** Do not assign Code 0 unless the documentation specifically supports smoking status. Use Code 9 (Unknown if ever smoked) when smoking status or the specific smoking method cannot be verified.

Recommendations for Registrars

- Capture Tobacco Use Smoking Status whenever it is documented in the medical record.
- Support coded values with appropriate text documentation.
- Smoking status is often documented in nursing assessments, physician notes, and other clinical documentation. Review available sources to identify and capture the information when it is available.

References

[NAACCR Data Dictionary: Tobacco Use Smoking Status \(Item #334\)](#)

Questions?

If you have questions regarding this topic, need assistance interpreting coding guidance, or have other cancer registry-related questions, please contact the Vermont Cancer Registry at AHS.VDHHSICancerRegistry@vermont.gov.