

Oklahoma students leading the way to tobacco-free lives

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The need for national education on tobacco continues. "Oklahoma, however, has better news to report. Latest data for Oklahoma middle school and high school students indicate that since 1999, fewer of these students use any type of tobacco product." The Jackson County Health Department Tobacco Coordinator, Tonya Pogue, sent this article to the Altus Times.

According to a report just released by the U. S. Surgeon General, "Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults", far too many youth and young adults are using tobacco. In Oklahoma, an estimated 3.7 percent of middle school students and almost 18 percent of high school students smoke.

"While the long-term health effects of tobacco use are well-known, this report concludes that smoking early in life has substantial health risks that begin almost immediately - even for youth and young adults," said Karen Weaver, Administrator of the Jackson County Health Department. "The younger people are when they start using tobacco, the more likely they are to get addicted and the more heavily addicted they will become." Nationwide, declines in the use of tobacco by youth and young adults have slowed for cigarette smoking and stalled for smokeless tobacco use after years of steady progress.

Oklahoma, however, has better news to report.

Latest data for Oklahoma middle school and high school students indicate that since 1999, fewer of these students use any type of tobacco product.

For example, from 2009 to 2011, cigarette smoking decreased 11 percent among high school students and 43 percent among middle school students. Smokeless tobacco use remained the same among high school students and decreased 20 percent among middle school students. Cigar use also remained the same among high school students but decreased 14 percent among middle school students.

Among young adults aged 18 to 24 years of age, smoking cigarettes has decreased by 20 percent in Oklahoma.

While noting some progress in smoking among youth, Oklahoma public health officials are still concerned that tobacco marketing is a key factor in causing young people to start using tobacco. More than \$1 million an hour is spent on marketing tobacco products in this country - and 99 percent of all new smokers come from youth and young adult populations who are enticed to smoke by this marketing.

"The evidence in the new Surgeon General's report clearly demonstrates the need for intensified and sustained efforts to prevent our young people from using tobacco," said Weaver. "We know what works: comprehensive efforts that include mass media campaigns, 100 percent smoke-free laws in restaurants, bars and worksites, high cigarette prices, evidence-based school programs, and sustained community-wide efforts.

If Oklahoma fully funded its tobacco control program and adopted the strategies outlined in the report, youth smoking rates could decline by half in six years.

And more importantly, we would reduce the staggering toll that tobacco takes on our families and communities." Successful tobacco prevention programs more than pay for themselves in lives and health care dollars saved; the most effective ones are funded at or near CDC-recommended levels.

Oklahoma ranks 7th for funding tobacco prevention programs, spending more than \$21 million on tobacco control programs as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This investment is money well spent as more and more local cities and towns are taking action in their communities.

Currently, there are 253 school districts that have adopted 24/ 7 tobacco-free policies out of 522 districts in the state. Seventy percent of public school students attend a 24/ 7 tobacco-free school. Numerous communities have adopted Clean Indoor Air and Youth Access ordinances that mirror the state laws and are clearly ready to take responsible measures to increase the health and economic development within their communities. Tobacco use prevention activities occurring in Jackson County include an upcoming Kick Butts Day event being held at the Altus Community Center on March 29 from 3:30 -6:00 p.m. This event is a partnership with the Jackson County Memorial Hospital in that, JCMH will offer a free health screening to everyone who attends that will include checking blood pressure, body mass index and blood sugar.

The Jackson County Tobacco Education Committee was awarded one of the OK Turning Point Council Champion of Health Awards in October 2011 for their efforts in tobacco education in the Jackson County communities.

For more information about tobacco prevention or if anyone is interested in learning more about the coalition or joining, please contact the Jackson County Health Department at 580-482-7308.

The Big Tobacco Industry appends approximately \$245.8 million in Oklahoma and \$13.4 billion across the nation advertising their deadly products.

Published research studies have found that kids are twice as sensitive to tobacco advertising as adults.

Youth are most likely to be influenced to smoke by cigarette marketing than by peer pressure and that one-third of underage experimentation with smoking is attributed to tobacco company advertising.

The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline (1-800-QUIT NOW) offers assistance to Oklahomans in receiving free telephone and web-based based quit coaching and a free two-week starter kit of nicotine patches or gum. People who call the Helpline and also use patch, gum or other quitting medications are more than twice as likely to quit. The phone call to the Helpline is free and so are the services they offer. Most people who call the Helpline are eligible to receive free patches or gum. More importantly the Helpline works. Thousands of Oklahomans have already called the Helpline and found out that the Helpline coach made sense and gave them ideas about how to quit and stay quit. Quit now - there's never a better time. The Helpline is funded by the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and the US Center for Disease Control.

For more information on Oklahoma tobacco control activities, please visit "[http:// tups. health. ok. gov](http://tups.health.ok.gov)" or "[http:// www.stopswithme.com](http://www.stopswithme.com)". For online copies of the Surgeon Generals report, executive summary, and an easy to-read guide on tobacco use and young people, visit [www.surgeongeneral. gov](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov)".

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