



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Public Health launches program to help teens quit smoking

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health is encouraging all teenagers, including pregnant teens, to call the Alabama Tobacco Quitline, 1-800-Quit-Now, for help in quitting tobacco products.

The department has launched a statewide campaign detailing the dangers of tobacco to teenagers, including pregnant teens. The department has produced a new Web page for teens on MySpace, <http://www.myspace.com/alquitnow>, as well as printed posters and pamphlets referring teens and pregnant teens to the Quitline for help.

The Quitline, 1-800-Quit-Now, provides free counseling to callers. Teens can receive a quit kit which helps them develop their personalized quit plan. Teens who agree to counseling and complete the program will receive a gift card from a national retailer.

“The number of teens who smoke in Alabama has steadily been increasing, and this is alarming,” said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. State numbers decreased for a while, but they have been climbing.

In Alabama, nearly 27 percent of high school students smoke, according to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids’ Web site. The national rate for teenage smokers is about 14 percent, according to the campaign’s statistics.

In Alabama, more than 12,000 kids under 18 become new daily smokers each year, and 174,000 of them under 18 and alive today will ultimately die prematurely from smoking, according to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids’ Web site.

Pregnant teenagers are smoking at higher rates also. In Alabama, more than 20 percent of white teen mothers and 3.4 percent of black teen mothers smoke, according to 2006 figures from the health department. In 2006, there were 1,124 pregnant teens in Alabama who said they smoked, according to health department statistics. Many pregnant teens will not report they smoke, so the actual number is higher than the figures show.

Smoking during pregnancy can cause a multitude of problems. There is a strong link between tobacco use during pregnancy and complications such as pre-term delivery, low birth weight, stillbirth, miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy and neonatal and perinatal mortality.

The Quitline has been in operation since 2005. The Quitline is available to all Alabama residents from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Calls left on the weekend will be returned the next business day.

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