



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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State's high school youth are smoking less

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabama high school students are getting the message that smoking isn't cool, according to the results of the 2008 Youth Tobacco Survey conducted by the Alabama Department of Public Health's Tobacco Prevention Branch.

There was a 17.5 percent decrease in high school students who smoke in 2008 compared to those who said they smoked in 2006, according to the survey. About 22.1 percent of high school students said they smoked in the 2008 survey compared to nearly 27 percent who reported they smoked in 2006.

The 2008 survey was administered in 43 public high schools earlier this year. The results are based on the sampling of 1,384 students who completed usable questionnaires.

More than half the students who smoke say they want to quit, according to the survey. Cigars were the most prevalent tobacco product used after cigarettes for high school students, with 15 percent reporting they smoked them.

While the prevalence rate for state teens is dropping, nationally, youth tobacco rates have stalled, according to the Office on Smoking and Health, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cigarette use among high school students declined from 1997 to 2003, but rates remained stable from 2003 to 2007. Nationally, just under 22 percent of students ages 14-18 smoke, according to CDC.

Alabama has made significant progress addressing adolescent tobacco use, said Dr. Donald Williamson, Alabama's state health officer. "We fund community groups to educate people about the dangers of secondhand smoke and to encourage youth to reject tobacco use," Dr. Williamson said. In the past year, the Youth Empowerment Program, a peer-teaching model, reached more than 58,000 teens with tobacco prevention and secondhand smoke messages, he said.

In addition, Life Skills training curriculum is provided to sixth graders in selected schools across the state. This program has been proven to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse and violence by targeting major social and psychological factors that promote these behaviors, he said.

Also, the department has launched a new teen cessation project using television and radio ads, a MySpace page for teens and training for health care providers, Dr. Williamson said.

Teens who want to quit tobacco can call the Alabama Tobacco Quitline, 1-800-Quit-Now, for free counseling, said Dr. Williamson. The Quitline is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday. An incentive is offered to teens who complete counseling and successfully quit tobacco.

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