



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104
Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5520

www.adph.org

Make the next generation tobacco free; an alarming number of Alabama high school students smoke cigarettes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Barry Riddle
(334) 206-5604

More than \$1 million is spent each hour to market tobacco products in this country--and 99 percent of all new smokers are youth and young adults who are enticed by this marketing. According to a new Surgeon General's report, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults*, far too many young people use tobacco.

In the U.S., more than 600,000 middle school students and 3 million high school students smoke cigarettes. In Alabama, surveys indicate that an estimated 18.6 percent of high school students smoke and 10,000 Alabama youth under 18 become new daily smokers each year.

More than 1,200 people die every day in the U.S. due to smoking. For every death, at least two new youths or young adults become regular smokers. About 90 percent of these replacement smokers smoke their first cigarette before age 18.

Smokeless or spit tobacco is also a concern. In Alabama, 19.1 percent of high school males use smokeless or spit tobacco. Nationwide, after years of steady progress, declines in both cigarette smoking and use of smokeless tobacco have stalled.

In the new Surgeon General's report, Alabama's Dr. Regina Benjamin calls on the nation to make the next generation tobacco free. This comprehensive report cites important scientific evidence on young people's sensitivity to nicotine. The younger they are when they start using tobacco, the more likely they are to become addicted for life. In fact, nicotine addiction causes about three out of four teens to continue smoking into adulthood, even if they intended to quit after a few years.

The report finds that tobacco marketing is a key factor in causing young people to start using tobacco, and nicotine addiction keeps them using it. "The evidence in the new report clearly demonstrates the need for intensified and sustained efforts to prevent our young people from using tobacco," said State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson. "We know what works: comprehensive efforts that include mass media campaigns, 100 percent smoke-free laws, high cigarette prices, evidence-based school programs, and sustained community-wide efforts. We must redouble our efforts to protect Alabama's youngest and most vulnerable citizens."

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. For heart

disease, some damage is seen in most young smokers. Smoking during youth and adolescence also slows down lung growth. Teens who smoke are not only short of breath today—they may end up as adults with lungs that never reach their full capacity. That damage is permanent.

Currently there are 34 local comprehensive smoke-free ordinances that protect citizens from secondhand smoke in one or all workplaces, restaurants and bars. These ordinances cover only 15 percent of the population. At 22.6 percent, Alabama has the seventh highest smoking rate among adults, according survey data. As of 2010, Alabama ranked 47th in state excise tax at 42.5 cents per pack.

There is still much work to be done in Alabama. Reducing youth smoking rates would lessen the burden of tobacco on families and communities.

For more information on tobacco control activities, visit adph.org/tobacco/.