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March 9, 2012



**NEW SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT CALLS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES
TO MAKE THE NEXT GENERATION TOBACCO-FREE**

Mobile, Ala. -- Almost 50 years after the landmark 1964 Surgeon General's Report on tobacco, Dr. Regina Benjamin, United States Surgeon General, released a new report and called on the nation to make the next generation tobacco-free. According to the report, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults*, far too many youth and young adults are using tobacco. Today more than 600,000 middle school students and 3 million high school students smoke cigarettes. In Alabama alone, an estimated 20 percent of high school students smoke.

Each day more than 1,200 people die due to smoking. For every one of those deaths, at least two new youths or young adults become regular smokers. And 90 percent of these replacement smokers smoke their first cigarette before they turn age 18.

In Alabama the latest data show that the rate of smoking has declined slightly in the past few years and smokeless tobacco rates are rising as more than 11 percent of high school students use these different types of tobacco products. 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.

The comprehensive report provides further scientific evidence on young people's sensitivity to nicotine. The younger they are when they start using tobacco, the more likely they are to get addicted and the more heavily addicted they will become. Nicotine addiction will cause about three out of four teens to smoke into adulthood, even if they intend 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. 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. Tobacco companies say their marketing only promotes brand choices among adult smokers; but, regardless of intent, it encourages underage youth to smoke. The more young people are exposed to cigarette advertising and promotional activities, the more likely they are to smoke. The report shows tobacco advertising and promotion encourages the myth that smoking makes and keeps you thin. This message is especially appealing to young girls. This report concludes that teen smokers are not thinner than non-smokers.

Images in tobacco marketing make tobacco use look appealing to young people, who want to fit in with their peers. Kids and teens see smoking in their social circles, movies they watch, video games they play, Websites they visit, and many communities where they live. Smoking is often

portrayed as a normal, acceptable, even appealing activity; young people exposed to these images are more likely to smoke. And in 2010, nearly a third of top-grossing movies for children, those with G, PG, or PG-13 ratings, contained images of tobacco use. The report concludes that smoking in movies causes youth to start smoking.

“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 Dr. Bernard Eichold, Health Officer, Mobile County Health Department (MCHD). “We know what works: comprehensive efforts that include mass media campaigns, smoke-free restaurants, bars and workplaces, pricing strategies on tobacco products, evidence-based school programs, and sustained community wide efforts. We must redouble our efforts to protect the young people in Mobile County.”

“The Just Breathe, Smoke Free Mobile County campaign is working to address the smoking prevalence of teens and adolescents through a school-based program call Students Working Against Tobacco (S.W.A.T.),” said Cathy Clothier, MCHD Education Outreach Coordinator. “Through peer-to-peer presentations inside the classroom, students are able to identify the ill effects of smoking and tactics used by the tobacco industry.”

“Efforts are also underway to provide education to our surrounding communities on the effect of tobacco advertising in tobacco retail stores like gas stations and other convenience stores and the prevalence of youth smoking and tobacco use initiation,” said Clothier.

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. For heart disease, we see early damage in most young smokers and those most sensitive die very young. Smoking during youth and adolescence 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.

For online copies of the full Surgeon General’s report, executive summary, and an easy-to-read guide on tobacco use and young people, visit www.surgeongeneral.gov.

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