



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Students Work Together to 'Free My Ride' of Secondhand Smoke



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BURLINGTON – Hannah Crowley, 11, knew she wanted to participate in the Free My Ride campaign after getting sick from exposure to secondhand smoke.

“I got pneumonia and I wanted to prevent smoking in cars and keep other kids from getting sick,” she said on her audition tape for a new video the campaign released today. Crowley is a sixth grader at Hunt Middle School. “Opening the car window does not protect me from secondhand smoke, and being exposed can lead to respiratory infections.”

One in three high school students reported that they had been exposed to secondhand smoke inside a car in the past week, according to the 2011 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The Free My Ride campaign was developed by the Vermont Department of Health to provide students, many of whom are driven to school each day, with a unified forum to speak out against secondhand smoke exposure.

The campaign is led by Vermont Kids Against Tobacco (VKAT) and Our Voices Xposed (OVX) coalitions, two groups that empower youth to get actively involved in tobacco control. VKAT and OVX have more than 400 members across the state who work together with the Health Department and community groups to educate parents and other students about the health risks associated with tobacco use.



Deerfield Valley Community Partnership is one of the community coalitions that supports the campaign, and has been collecting pledges from Vermonters who believe that secondhand smoke in cars needs to be stopped.

Mai Linh Vankirk, a freshman at Essex High School, joined VKAT last year during middle school, and said she learned about the Free My Ride campaign from the school nurse, who suggested she audition for the video.

“I am not exposed to smoke in a car, but I know so many other students are, and I wanted to do something about it,” Vankirk said. She said filming the campaign video lasted nearly three hours, but it was well worth her time. Her part of the video includes a warning to parents that secondhand smoke can lead to ear infections.

Got to the Free My Ride Facebook page, which has already received more than 300 “likes,” to watch the video: www.freemyridevt.com. Follow the campaign on Twitter: [@FreeMyRideVT](https://twitter.com/FreeMyRideVT) or Facebook: [/FreeMyRideVT](https://www.facebook.com/FreeMyRideVT).

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