



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Vermont Department of Health and OVX Reach Out to Teens

Campaign Moves Beyond Prevention To Lower Teen Smoking Rate

For Immediate Release: Feb. 9, 2011

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BURLINGTON – The number of Vermont youth (14-17 years old) who smoke has remained steady at 16 percent for the past five years, after falling sharply from 38 percent to 16 percent in the decade leading up to 2005.

In order to reach these older teens, a new educational campaign was developed by the Vermont Department of Health and OVX (Our Voices Xposed), a youth-led, youth-run movement focused on exposing the truth about tobacco. OVX has 14 youth leadership groups around the state, and the campaign is supported by 17 community coalitions.

“In the long-term, we’ve been successful in reducing the numbers of youth smokers by encouraging them to never start,” said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. “Now that we’ve reached a certain level we need to go beyond traditional prevention messages, to help teens who have just started occasional smoking, but are not yet committed smokers.”

According to the **2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey**, 28 percent of Vermont teens have tried smoking. Youth understand that smoking is bad for them, but knowing it is an unhealthy choice isn’t enough. Many teens also lack the support to stay smoke-free, especially when they are surrounded by adults and peers who smoke.

The educational outreach in the new anti-smoking campaign depicts a group of friends dealing with tobacco and health issues.

As part of the campaign development process the Vermont Department of Health interviewed teens in Burlington, Rutland and St. Johnsbury. Key findings include:

- Youth who smoke know that it’s bad for them, but they try smoking anyway due to peer and societal influences; since youth highly value their social circle.
- Anti-tobacco education and advertising typically focuses on preventing youth from starting to smoke. Young people who’ve tried smoking feel that the anti-smoking outreach doesn’t apply to them.
- If youth stop smoking, they fear that they’ll lose their connection to friends and family who also smoke.
- Youth smokers need help finding appropriate resources to help them quit.

“We’re excited to see the push to help youth who feel disenfranchised,” said Ray Coffey, executive director of Essex CHIPS. “At the Essex Teen Center, when we connect teens who’ve smoked with adult mentors and healthy alternatives – athletics, theater, community service – they’ve been able to change their behaviors and turn away from tobacco.”

Drawing insights for the education and outreach materials from interviews and video diaries created by teens, the Health Department developed two new 30-second television ads for the “Gut Feelings” campaign that show a group of teens talking to each other about smoking while posing as lungs, a brain and a stomach. Both “Taco” and “Pickles” use humor and group dynamics to get teens to quit while they’re ahead, before they are addicted and committed smokers. The ads will be shown on television and in movie theaters around the state.

The Health Department also created movie-style posters, stickers and a key chain (that looks like a brain) with the campaign message “Quit While You’re Ahead.”

To learn more about the support available for teens who want to quit smoking, visit www.ovx.org. For more information on the Health Department’s Tobacco Control Program go to HealthVermont.gov/prevent/tobacco.

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