

VT works to prevent youth from smoking & help teens quit

A study recently released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that the decline in high school smoking rates that started in 1997 has slowed considerably since 2003. In fact, the CDC found that there was no decline in high school smoking rates from 2007 to 2009. According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), the overall youth smoking rate in Vermont has remained unchanged at 16% since 2005. The 2009 smoking rates for the state's teens in grades 11 and 12 are higher at 18% and 21%.

The CDC says reductions in advertising, promotion and availability of tobacco products combined with increases in the price of tobacco products, tobacco-free environments and expanded counter-advertising campaigns could lead to larger reductions in youth smoking rates in the future.

Vermont has had strong laws in place since 1997 to restrict youth access to tobacco products, including banning vending machines and moving tobacco products behind store counters. In recent years, the state banned smoking in all public places and workplaces and raised taxes on tobacco products.

The Vermont Department of Health, although limited by diminishing appropriations to address tobacco use, implements an annual statewide public education campaign, lead by youth through community coalitions and schools, to encourage peers to remain smoke-free.

These policies are aimed at preventing youth from starting to smoke. But what about the 6,400 Vermont students who do smoke? The American Lung Association in Vermont (ALA) offers N-O-T, Not on Tobacco, a teen smoking cessation program, through community programs and schools. This 10-week program, funded in part by the Vermont Department of Health, helps teens either quit smoking or reduce the number of cigarettes smoked. The ALA provides free facilitator training to

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The typical teen enrolled in N-O-T is a 16 year-old male who has been smoking an average of 12 cigarettes per day, first tried a cigarette at age 11 and has a close friend and a parent who smokes. He has tried to quit smoking nearly three times and is at least somewhat motivated to quit smoking again.

Terri Daniels, N-O-T program coordinator, noted, "N-O-T is an evidence-based program proven to be effective in helping teens quit smoking or cut back. Teens enrolled in N-O-T gain skills that help them stop using tobacco; and just as importantly, they learn how to make health lifestyle choices for the rest of their lives."

Preventing youth from starting to smoke and helping those who smoke quit is paramount. Tobacco use is still the number one cause of preventable death. At least one-third of youth that become regular smokers will ultimately lose their lives because of it. Their smoking will also add to the crushing burden of tobacco-related healthcare costs. For more information about N-O-T, contact the American Lung Association in Williston, 876-6500 or 800-LUNG-USA, option 1.

