

An Issue of Influence...Is tobacco use still an issue among our youth?

We have seen by the surveys and studies in the past that youth cigarette smoking is, for the most part, on the decline. According to 2008 national statistics, 7% of 8th graders, 12% of 10th graders and 20% of 12th graders had used cigarettes in the 30 days prior to the survey. At that time, these statistics were the lowest levels in the history of the survey. Notice a steady incline in the percentage as the youth get older?

Our latest Minnesota Student Survey results indicate that we have a mixed result for our 9th and 12th grade youth in Hubbard County. According to the 2007 survey, 35% of 9th grade males and 28% of 9th grade females used tobacco in the previous 30 days before the survey. The 2010 survey results were a decline for 9th grade males to 22% and an increase for 9th grade females to 30%. Hubbard County high school seniors results showed no change among males at 53% and a large decrease for females from 44% to 23% for past 30 day use. Smokeless tobacco rates declined for 9th grade males from 22% in 2007 to 17% in 2010 but rose just 1% for 9th grade females from 6% to 7% for past 30 day use. Rates increased for both males and females in 12th grade from 33% to 37% and from 3% to 4% respectively. Despite the mixed results, it is disturbing that some of these numbers are increasing. It is also disturbing that over half of our high school male 12th graders use tobacco.

The alarm continues with the latest national survey stating that smoking among 18-24 year olds has increased. One wonders with all the education, regulation and taxation how could this happen? The answer lies in the fact that this is the age group that is being heavily targeted by the tobacco companies. Tobacco companies put on many promotional events at fraternities, sororities, bars, and clubs where free tobacco samples, coupons, and paraphernalia are given away. One survey of U.S. colleges and universities found that students at almost all schools, 118 out of 119, reported a tobacco promotion event on campus or in a bar or club where free samples were available. Some of the bar activities include: games, contests, (i.e., female swimsuits & body art exhibitions) and free cigarette samples distributed by models. The message is that life is a party and the party includes tobacco use. What these young adults don't realize is that when the party ends, the addiction to nicotine continues.

Since the tobacco settlements, the tobacco industry has nearly doubled its marketing budget according to the Federal Trade Commission report (2006) from 6.7 billion to 12.5 billion dollars. Much of this budget goes to "point of sale" marketing. Examples of point of sale marketing are buy one get one free, discounts redeemed by the tobacco companies, special shelving and displays, volume discounts for retailers, etc. Along with the point of sale marketing, the use of direct mail is prevalent. Mailers with multiple coupons giving discounts, gifts in the mail, website promotions are some of the other successful marketing strategies.

Tobacco companies are also marketing new smokeless products that are said to do everything from helping you through the day in a smokeless environment to even

helping you quit. Unfortunately some of the smokeless products deliver more nicotine than a cigarette. Smokeless tobacco promotion went from 145.5 million in 1999 to 354.1 million dollars in 2006. New products are flooding the market in packages that look like gum and mint containers. Some resemble lip balm containers as well. Included in these products are snus, a form of chewing tobacco in a small pouch so you have less need to spit, dissolvable products in packaging that mimics mint containers or look like herbal tablets and e-cigarettes.

The good news is that a new legislation was passed in Minnesota this year ensuring that new tobacco products cannot be put on the shelf next to the candy and gum and youth cannot purchase e-cigarettes. But the lesson here is that we all must be mindful that the mighty power and creativity of marketing evolves. I have yet to talk to an adult smoker that said they were happy that they started smoking and do not wish to be able to quit. We need to stay alert to the new products. Parents and school staff need to educate themselves to be able to spot these new products in the backpacks and purses of our youth. We need to continue to educate our youth the harms and addictive property of tobacco use. Most of all, we need to set an example. If you or someone you know wants to quit smoking, join in the Great American Smoke Out on November 18th. Log onto Hubbard County Great American Smoke Out on Facebook or call Diane Brophy at (218) 237-5483 for a Quit Kit today.

It is an Issue of Influence...

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