



## HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

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### Help Teens Kick (or Not Start) Habit

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This past week youth across the nation celebrated *National Kick Butts Day*. National Kick Butts Day began in 1995 by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids to empower youth to speak up and take action against tobacco use. With that recent reminder, now is a good time to talk to your kids about tobacco use.

- Each day about 1,100 young people begin smoking cigarettes on a daily basis. Almost ninety percent of people who smoke began smoking by age 18.
- We have been successful in recent years getting more adults to stop smoking, but Thurston County has the tenth highest cigarette-smoking rate for high school seniors among the 39 Washington State counties.

Tobacco use by young people is a real problem with real consequences. According to the Centers for Disease Control, tobacco is a highly addictive substance, so the younger people are when they begin using tobacco; the more likely they are to become strongly addicted to nicotine. Several studies have found nicotine to be addictive in ways similar to heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. Of all addictive behaviors, cigarette smoking is one of the most likely to become established during adolescence. Tobacco use by young people leads to immediate, serious health problems including respiratory and non-respiratory effects, addiction to nicotine, and associated risk for other drug use. Tobacco use at an early age also increases the risk for lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, chronic lung disease, and several forms of cancer.

**So why do kids start using tobacco?** Peer pressure is part of the reason, another part is marketing influences. Tobacco companies spend billions (12.4 billion in 2006) on promoting and advertising their products in the United States every year. Research shows that retail cigarette marketing increases the likelihood that youth start smoking.

Adults can take actions to protect young people from using tobacco, whether or not they use tobacco themselves. First if you do not use tobacco, do not start. If you do, try to quit. For help quitting contact the WA State Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. If you use tobacco, share your struggles with quitting with your kids. Studies show that young people greatly underestimate the difficulty of quitting. Continue to try to quit, as it sends a strong anti-tobacco message.

Start talking to your young kids and tell them that you do not want them to use tobacco and that it would be a disappointment if they do. Keep a tobacco-free home. Not allowing any tobacco use in your home or on your property makes it less convenient and shows how undesirable the behavior is. Destroy the myth that everybody smokes or uses tobacco. Many young people overestimate the number of smokers among their peers. This faulty assumption is a strong indicator of smoking initiation. Finally, talk with your kids about how ads and images in tobacco marketing are designed to manipulate

them. Talk with them about how the ads glamorize tobacco use as cool, mature, and sexy but that advertisers really just want to manipulate them into buying a deadly product.

If you have an open relationship with your teens, tell them that you do not want them to use tobacco because it can affect their health. If your relationship with your teens is a bit touchy, encourage them to talk to their friends that do not smoke or to another trusted adult. Support their interest in sports and physical activities. Many sport coaches discourage substance use. Show your support for their interest in tobacco prevention efforts.

If you are interested in supporting other local tobacco prevention efforts, please contact TOGETHER! at 360-493-2230.

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