



State of North Carolina
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INDEPENDENCE DAY NEWS: MORE NC TEENS TOTALLY INDEPENDENT OF TOBACCO

RALEIGH – As the day approaches when US citizens celebrate the nation's independence, more North Carolina teens are choosing total independence from tobacco products.

In 2003 nearly two-thirds of middle school (62.4%) and over one-third of high school students (34.5%) reported never having used any tobacco product. This is a significant increase from 1999, when 55.3% of middle school students and 27.8% of high school students reported never having tried tobacco. For middle and high school students, girls are more likely than boys to have never used tobacco. The percentage of teens who have never used cigarettes or cigars has increased in both middle and high school students in all categories except Hispanics between 1999 and 2001.

"This change may indicate that the social norms around tobacco use are changing," said Sally Herndon Malek, head of the NC TPCB. She said local community and school programs, media campaigns and the increase in smoking bans in schools and public places make tobacco seem less acceptable to teens, and take it out of the center of youth culture.

"When a N.C. teen makes the decision to never even try tobacco, that makes a huge statement," Malek said. "Of course, keeping even these non-smokers tobacco-free for life is still a challenge."

Today's announcement is based on preliminary results from the N.C. Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS). According to the survey, one in five of these non-smoking students answered questions in ways that suggest they are considering using tobacco in the future. Thus, 80% of them indicate that they have decided against future tobacco use.

"It's great news that more NC teens are choosing independence from tobacco products," Malek said, "but nearly 34% of high school students currently use tobacco. We need to continue promoting what we know to work; including media campaigns coordinated with local programs, smoking bans and increased price. And we need to help teens who want to quit smoking."

The Health and Wellness Trust Fund, chaired by Lt. Governor Beverly Perdue, is using N.C. tobacco settlement funding to address youth smoking through local and state grants and the Tobacco.Reality.Unfiltered (TRU) Campaign.

"We're working together to give young people the support they need to say 'no' to tobacco in even greater numbers," Perdue said. "We're beginning to make a difference in the lives of young people, but there's much more work to be done."

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According to the NC YTS current cigarette use among middle school students (grades 6-8) has dropped 37% since 1999, from 15.0% (1999) to 11.3% (2001), and finally to 9.3% (2003) in the most recent survey.

High school current cigarette use was 27.3% in the 2003 survey, which is not significantly lower than 2001 or 1999.

Details on this and other results from the NC YTS can be found at: www.communityhealth.dhhs.state.nc.us/tobacco.htm. More information on teens and tobacco use can be found at www.StepUpNC.com and www.realityunfiltered.com.

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