



State of North Carolina  
Department of Health and Human Services

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**NOTE: THIS RELEASE IS EMBARGOED UNTIL NOON ON THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2004.**

**NC Middle Schoolers Using Tobacco Less;  
For Every One Tobacco Death, 20 North Carolinians Suffer with Serious Illness from Smoking**

RALEIGH-- In conjunction with the national release of the 2004 Surgeon General's Report: *The Health Consequences of Smoking*, the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB) reports that while new data show middle school tobacco use is in decline, much must be done to protect our next generation from tobacco-related illness.

"The health effects of smoking are more widespread than previously thought," said Marcus Plescia, M.D., chief of the Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention Section in the NC Department of Health and Human Services. "The list of diseases that the Surgeon General has conclusively linked with smoking has grown even longer. Plus, for every person who dies from a smoking attributable disease, there are 20 more people suffering with at least one serious illness from smoking."

"To protect our future, we need to implement what we know works to prevent tobacco use among North Carolinians – youth and adults alike," said Sally Herndon Malek, MPH, head of the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch. For example, the Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch promotes smokefree restaurants; this protects families and service industry workers from secondhand smoke and helps tobacco users who want to quit. This also sets a great example for our youth."

"Given the Surgeon General's report, it's clear that kids face more dangerous health consequences than ever before known if they begin smoking. We absolutely cannot let up on the work we're doing to make our kids tobacco free," said Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, Chairperson of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), which has invested \$28 million in programs at the state and local levels to prevent tobacco use among teens. "We want to see steeper declines in tobacco use. And that means continuing to support and build prevention programs in communities across the state and awareness campaigns that bring the prevention message to middle school and high school students."

Today the Branch released preliminary findings from the 2003 N.C. Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS), which show that across North Carolina current cigarette use among middle school students (grades 6-8) has dropped 38% since 1999, from 15.0% (1999) to 11.3% (2001), and finally to 9.3% (2003) in the most recent survey. "Unfortunately, high school current cigarette use was 27.3% in the 2003 survey, which is not significantly lower than 2001 or 1999," Malek said.

According to the TPCB, these newest data were collected only a few months in to the new programs funded by the Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission (HWTFC), and would not yet show changes in tobacco use behavior caused by these new initiatives.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), smoking has caused 12 million deaths since the first Surgeon General's Report was released in 1964. On average, adults who smoke die 13 to 14 years earlier than nonsmokers. The economic toll exceeds \$157 billion dollars each year--\$75 billion in direct medical costs and \$82 billion in lost productivity.

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“Families see their futures go up in smoke,” said Plescia. “We hope this will also bring attention to World No Tobacco Day, held May 31 and sponsored by the World Health Organization.” This year's theme in the United States focuses on what tobacco costs families.

A detailed summary of the Surgeon General's report, *The Health Consequences of Smoking*, and other related information can be found on the CDC's Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco>).

The NC YTS survey was conducted in the fall of 2003 with 6,334 middle and high school students at 200 randomly selected schools in North Carolina. More information about the survey and selected results can be found at <http://www.communityhealth.dhhs.state.nc.us/tobacco.htm>.

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