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COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Press Release

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State survey shows significant drop in youth smoking in Alaska

2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey highlights risks facing high school students

(ANCHORAGE) — The state's health commissioner and chief medical officer announced today that smoking among Alaska high school students has declined 40 percent between 2007 and 2013, from 17.8 percent in 2007 to only 10.6 percent in 2013.

That means only one in 10 Alaska high school students reported smoking at least one cigarette during the past 30 days, according to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey that was administered last spring by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health.

The department surveyed 1,247 students from 43 high schools — randomly selected to represent all traditional public high schools in Alaska (excluding boarding schools, alternative schools, and correctional facilities). Survey results are posted online at:

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Pages/yrbs/yrbsresults.aspx>

“I am pleased to report that fewer Alaska youth are taking up the deadly habit of smoking today compared to six years ago,” said DHSS Commissioner William Streur. “Tobacco use remains one of the leading causes of disease and early death, so preventing that habit at an earlier age saves lives, and improves the quality of life for so many of our children.” Streur added, “While it is encouraging to see these numbers moving in the right direction, we also know that there remains much work to be done. The tobacco companies continue to aggressively target young Alaskans, and we must remain vigilant in our fight to combat their message.”

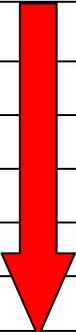
For more than a decade, the department's Tobacco Prevention and Control Program has used a comprehensive approach to prevent children from starting to smoke and to help current smokers quit. The Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program efforts have helped change social norms related to tobacco use through strong tobacco-free policies in schools, communities and health care settings; a sustained, statewide public education campaign; and tobacco taxes. Alaska's children now benefit from an increasing number of policies that limit their exposure to secondhand smoke in schools and communities, said state Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ward Hurlburt.

“Today, 9 out of 10 Alaska teens don't believe it's cool to smoke and know their parents would not approve if they smoked cigarettes,” Hurlburt said.

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The statewide decline in youth smoking is matched with other significant declines in tobacco use. A significant decline means the decrease is unlikely to be due to chance:

Percentage of Alaska Youth Who Reported	2007	2013
Ever trying a cigarette	52.7%	35.7%
Smoking before age 13	16.1%	9.4%
Smoking 20 of the last 30 days	7.4%	3.9%
Ever smoking daily	13.8%	7.2%
Being exposed to secondhand smoke in the past week	46.1%	31.1%



The 2013 data also show that smoking rates are coming down across population groups. The percentage of Alaska Native youth who report smoking during the past 30 days declined from 31.7 percent in 2007 to 18.5 percent in 2013. Despite this decline, Alaska Native youth still smoke at more than twice the rate of non-Native youth (18.5 percent among Alaska Native youth versus 8.0 percent among non-Native youth). In addition, rates of smokeless tobacco have not declined among youth.

Hurlburt stressed that the Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a critical tool to measure these risk behaviors that can harm Alaska children. The survey is conducted in schools across the nation every other year and has been conducted in Alaska since 1995. Comparable U.S. data for 2013 will be made available in the spring; until then, Alaska’s survey results cannot be compared with other states’ or national results.

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