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Report Finds Record Number of NC Teens Have Never Smoked

Smoking No Longer “Rite of Passage”, 100% Tobacco-Free Schools Policies Big Reason Why

(GREENVILLE, NC) – Today, in one of the newest Tobacco-Free School districts, NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) Chair Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue announced that the number of NC middle and high school students who have never tried smoking has increased significantly. These results show that more and more teens across the state are forgoing their first cigarette as a rite of passage into young adulthood.

Lt. Gov. Perdue was joined by NC State Board of Education Chair Howard Lee, Pitt County Schools Superintendent Dr. Beverly Reep and other educators to announce new results from the 2005 NC Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) at Hope Middle School in Greenville.

According to the 2005 YTS survey, 74.2% of middle school students and 45.7% of high school students *have never* smoked a cigarette, up double digit points from the 2001 and 2003 surveys. This fact is significant to the state’s teen tobacco movement because studies show if a teenager makes it to the age of 19 without ever smoking a cigarette, the likelihood of them starting is less than 20%.

“What this says is the prospect for real-long term success in preventing teens from starting is great,” said Lt. Gov. Perdue. “In North Carolina, we can create the first tobacco-free generation in this state’s history. These kids – the ones who are saying that cigarettes never have been and never will be part of their lives – are living proof that we are well on our way!”

The UNC School of Family Medicine cites one of the reasons for the growing number of students who haven’t taken a puff is the increasing number of NC school districts that have adopted the 100% TFS (Tobacco-Free Schools) policy. UNC reports that high schools with established 100% TFS policies report 40% fewer smokers than schools without the policy.

UNC attributes this success to the fact that from 2003 to 2005, there was rapid expansion of 100% TFS policies across the state, because of HWTF funding, jumping from 15 districts at the beginning of 2003 to 78 in 2006. HWTF began funding its statewide teen tobacco use prevention and cessation initiative in 2003. To date, 78 of the state’s 115 school districts – including Pitt County – have adopted the policy.

Earlier this year, Lt. Gov. Perdue announced the first round of survey results which showed that teen smoking rates have hit a historic low in North Carolina. The study’s data revealed that high school smoking rates have declined by one-third since 1999, and smoking rates among middle schoolers have dropped by two-thirds.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND:

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$127 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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