

NEWS RELEASE

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February 20-26 is national *Through with Chew Week* and an excellent time to call attention to smokeless tobacco use in Nebraska and encourage users to quit. Quit kits are available by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

"Smokeless tobacco is not a safe alternative to smoking and is even more habit forming because it contains a higher concentration of nicotine than cigarettes," said Tabi Prochazka, environmental coordinator with Panhandle Public Health District.

According to the 2009 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey* of 9th – 12th graders, 19.7% of Nebraska high school males used smokeless tobacco within the past 30 days. The national average for high school males is 15%. Nebraska's combined total (male and female) is 10.9%. The national combined total is 8.9%.

"Chewing tobacco use is more common in Nebraska than the nation as a whole," said Prochazka. "Young adults who try smokeless tobacco for the first time are often lured by the flavors: mint, vanilla, berry, or apple, and milder tastes. Over time smokeless tobacco users tend to 'graduate' to brands with more nicotine thereby getting more addicted."

"Smokeless tobacco can cause oral cancer, especially in the cheeks, gums and throat," Prochazka said. "The use of smokeless tobacco can also lead to other oral problems, such as mouth sores, gum recessions, tooth decay, bad breath and permanent discoloration of teeth."

For those ready to quit using smokeless tobacco, MyLastDip.com features free Web-based programs available to help chewers quit. One program targets 14 – 25 year olds, the other targets those 26+. Chewers can also call the free and confidential Nebraska Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-784-8669, text IMREADY to 39649, or visit QuitNow.ne.gov for resources and information.

Keeping youth from starting to use tobacco, reducing access to tobacco products and increasing awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke is a collaborative effort by the Panhandle Prevention Coalition that also focuses on reducing underage drinking, binge drinking and impaired driving. It's funded by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services/Tobacco Free Nebraska Program through the tobacco master settlement agreement.

For additional information about Tobacco Free Nebraska and smokeless tobacco, visit www.pphd.org. The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.