

District Health Department #4

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Back to School Tobacco-Free

10.5% of Michigan high school students currently smoke cigarettes, and 14.8% use e-cigarettes. Both rates are higher than the national average. Each year 5,200 Michigan kids under age 18 become new, daily smokers. 213,000 kids under 18 and alive in Michigan today ultimately die prematurely from smoking.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, the use of products containing nicotine in any form, including e-cigarettes, is unsafe for youth. The brain is not fully developed until the early to mid-20s. Exposure to nicotine during periods of significant brain development, including adolescence, can disrupt the growth of brain circuits that control attention, learning, and susceptibility to addiction. Effects can be long-lasting and can include lower impulse control and mood disorders.

“Although we have made significant progress in protecting our youth from tobacco-related health harms, we still have a long way to go,” stated Dr. Joshua Meyerson, Medical Director for District Health Department No. 4. “Far too many of our children are still using tobacco and are being exposed to the health harms caused by secondhand smoke. It is essential that we address e-cigarette use among young people, and do everything we can to prevent youth tobacco use, which can lead to a lifetime of addiction to a deadly product.”

Michigan spends \$4.59 billion annually on health care costs directly caused by smoking, including \$1.36 billion in state Medicaid costs. The tobacco industry spends an estimated \$320 million to market their products in Michigan each year. In contrast, Michigan spends only \$1.63 million on tobacco prevention and control programming. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, the more young people are exposed to cigarette advertising and promotional activities, the more likely they are to smoke, and 80% of underage smokers choose brands from among the top three most heavily advertised.

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As students head back to school, District Health Department No. 4 encourages parents and health care providers to talk to kids about tobacco use and to remind kids that spit tobacco and e-cigarettes are not a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes. Providing a tobacco-free example and home environment can also help to protect kids from tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure.

For young people who have already begun to use tobacco and want to quit, the Michigan Tobacco Quitline provides services for Michigan youth of any age. Young people can call the Quitline at 1-800-784-8669 or 1-800-QUIT-NOW and receive free telephone counseling to help them quit tobacco. In addition, the Quitline offers a free text messaging program and a self-guided online program to help youth quit tobacco. The Smokefree Teen website available at <http://teen.smokefree.gov/> provides tools to help young people quit.

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