



Tobacco Prevention

Tobacco use is the leading single cause of preventable death in our society — one in five of all deaths can be attributed to tobacco use. Most adults who use tobacco began doing so as children. Immediate health consequences for youth who use tobacco include impaired lung growth and function, increased respiratory illness, and poorer overall health. Early initiation of smoking has also been associated with increased risk of subsequent drug use and might be a marker for underlying mental health problems, such as depression.



Currently 8 percent of 8th graders, 13 percent of 10th graders and 20 percent of 12th graders smoke cigarettes.

Comprehensive school-based tobacco prevention programs have been shown to reduce youth tobacco use.¹

Tobacco-free School Policies and Procedures

State law requires that all school grounds be completely tobacco-free, and in fact 100 percent of school principals reported having a policy prohibiting tobacco use.

Principals reported that about 50 percent of secondary schools had an “ideal” tobacco policy that restricts anyone from using any type of tobacco by anyone, anywhere at anytime including non-school hours and at off-campus events.

Principals reported that two-thirds (65 percent) of secondary schools designated an individual with the primary responsibility for seeing that the tobacco use prevention policy was enforced.

There are a number of ways schools can enforce their tobacco-free policies and procedures. Research indicates that strongly enforced policies that support youth to quit using tobacco are more effective than policies with only punitive consequences like suspension.²

Principals reported secondary schools always or almost always take the following actions when students are caught smoking cigarettes:

- 95 percent informed parents or guardians.
- 93 percent referred to a school administrator.
- 41 percent encouraged education or cessation assistance.
- 40 percent referred to a school counselor.
- 39 percent suspended from school.
- 22 percent required education or cessation assistance.
- 18 percent given detention.
- 17 percent given in school suspension.

Principals reported about 27 percent of secondary schools provided tobacco cessation program referrals for faculty or staff, and about 79 percent of schools provided cessation referrals for students.

Despite strong policies and enforcement procedures, some students do not perceive that policies are enforced and are still using tobacco at school:



About 39 percent of 8th graders and 21 percent of 10th and 12th graders reported school tobacco policies were definitely enforced at their school.

¹ CDC (2001). “Effectiveness of school-based programs as a component of a statewide tobacco control initiative - Oregon, 1999-2000.” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 50(31): 663.

² Pentz MA, B. B., Charlin VL, Barrett EJ, MacKinnon DP, Flay BR. (1989). “The power of policy: the relationship of smoking policy to adolescent smoking.” *American Journal of Public Health* 79(7): 857-62.



Among students who are current cigarette smokers, about 38 percent of 8th graders and 42 percent of 10th graders reported using tobacco on school property.

Prominent signs indicating the tobacco-free school zone are an important component of policy promotion and enforcement. Principals reported that most (84 percent) secondary schools have signs posted marking a tobacco-free school zone, that is a specified distance from school grounds where tobacco use by students, faculty and staff, and visitors is not allowed.

Tobacco Prevention Instruction

Health teachers reported trying to increase student knowledge about tobacco hazards in required health education courses, including:

- 97 percent taught tobacco use prevention.
- 94 percent taught resisting peer pressure for unhealthy behaviors (i.e., refusal skills).



About 84 percent of 6th graders, 80 percent of 8th graders, and 74 percent of 10th graders reported receiving information in classes about the dangers of tobacco use once or more in the past year.

Health teachers reported teaching each of the following tobacco use prevention topics in a required health education course:

- 95 percent taught health consequences of cigarette smoking.
- 94 percent taught health, social environmental, and financial benefits of not smoking.
- 94 percent taught health consequences of smokeless tobacco.
- 93 percent taught addictive effects of nicotine.
- 92 percent taught how to “say no” to tobacco use.
- 91 percent taught health effects of secondhand smoke.
- 90 percent taught benefits of not using smokeless tobacco.

- 90 percent taught the number of tobacco illnesses and deaths.
- 88 percent taught media influences on tobacco use.
- 86 percent taught family influences on tobacco use.
- 84 percent taught how to support prevention.
- 84 percent taught how to support others to quit.
- 83 percent taught how many young people use tobacco.
- 82 percent taught social/cultural influences on tobacco use.
- 80 percent taught risks of cigar/pipe smoking.
- 74 percent taught how to find cessation information and services.
- 66 percent taught making a personal non-use commitment.

More work remains to improve knowledge among students:



About 62 percent of 6th graders and 75 percent of 8th and 10th graders think smoking a few cigarettes a day is harmful. About 70 percent of 6th graders and 65 percent of 8th and 10th graders think secondhand smoke is definitely harmful.

Tobacco Prevention Staff Development

To effectively teach tobacco prevention instruction, school staff still need education and training.

- About 32 percent of health teachers reported receiving staff development in tobacco prevention in the past two years.
- About 54 percent reported wanting to receive more staff development in tobacco prevention.

Tobacco Prevention Resources

Tobacco, drug, and weapon-free signs are available for all schools statewide from the Department of Health and Educational Service District Tobacco Prevention Programs. Links to ESD contacts are available at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/tobacco/other/edcoord.htm>.