



NEW SURGEON GENERAL’S REPORT CALLS ON DENVER TO MAKE THE NEXT GENERATION TOBACCO-FREE

Almost 50 years after the landmark 1964 Surgeon General’s Report on tobacco, Dr. Regina Benjamin, United States Surgeon General, recently released a new report and called on the nation to make the next generation be tobacco-free.

According to the report, Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults, far too many youth and young adults are using tobacco. Today more than 600,000 middle school students and 3 million high school students smoke cigarettes. Each day more than 1,200 people die due to smoking. For every one of those deaths, at least two new youths or young adults become regular smokers; 90 percent of these replacement smokers addiction will cause about three out of four teens to smoke into adulthood, even if they intend to quit after a few years.

Tobacco use among youth in Denver is high and at very unhealthy levels:

- In a recent survey, 24 percent of eleventh graders in Denver smoked.
- 31 percent of young adults (aged 18-24 years) smoke.

After years of progress, tobacco use smoke their first cigarette before they turn age 18. Nicotine use among adults in Denver has stalled at approximately 20 percent, compared to the national goal of 12 percent.

For more information on tobacco use in Denver, please see “The Health of Denver – 2011,” a comprehensive report on the health of the citizens of Denver:

<http://www.pageturnpro.com/Denver-Health-Hospital/36449-Health-of-Denver-2011/index.html#/1>.

“Denver data and the evidence in the new Surgeon General’s report provide a compelling case for intensified efforts to decrease tobacco use among Denver youth,” said William Burman, M.D., Director of [Denver Public Health](#). Other cities and states have shown that cost-effective interventions can dramatically reduce tobacco use among youth. New York City decreased

tobacco use among youth from 24 percent to 7 percent in just 10 years by raising taxes on tobacco, enhancing enforcement of existing laws about tobacco sales to youth, and educating children about the risks of tobacco use. Prevention works, and decreases in tobacco use among youth will decrease heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, and lung infections –four of the most common causes of death in Denver.”

Doug Linkhart, Manager of Denver Environmental Health points out, “Kids using tobacco has huge consequences in terms of costs down the road. This is when we can be most effective in aiding the health of Denver residents, when they are young and vulnerable to these kinds of habits.”

Specific steps that should be considered in Denver:

1. Tobacco retailing license – Denver has laws and regulations on the display and sale of tobacco, but cutbacks in public health funding has dramatically limited education of retailers and enforcement of those laws. As a result, Denver youth report little difficulty in buying tobacco. A high school student we work with said, ““A lot of the kids, I know smoke. At least 50 percent. Most of them just buy cigarettes from the small stores around the school or in their neighborhood.”

A tobacco retailing license for the estimated 680 stores that sell tobacco would ensure that retailers know the laws about displaying and selling tobacco products while providing funding for enforcement. Colorado is one of just 14 states that lacks a tobacco retailing license, and current state law penalizes Colorado cities and counties if they require a license to sell cigarettes. A bill is being considered in the state Senate that would create a state tobacco license. If the legislature does not act, Denver should consider requiring a license to sell all forms of tobacco except cigarettes – a provision that is allowed by state law and has been done in several Colorado counties.

2. Increased tobacco tax – The single most effective tool to decrease youth tobacco use is an increase in the price of tobacco. Since the cost of tobacco use (in medical care costs and lost productivity) to all taxpayers is about \$11 per pack, people who use tobacco should pay for money lost as a result of tobacco use. Colorado’s current tobacco tax (84 cents per pack) is far below the average for the country (\$1.46 per pack) and the average for surrounding states. Colorado should increase its tobacco tax, and if the state does not do so, the counties in the Denver metropolitan area should consider doing so.

3. Smoke-free housing – Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of asthma, chronic lung disease, lung cancer, and heart attacks. Many of Denver’s youth live in multiunit housing, and smoke travels from one unit to the next. Colorado’s Clean Indoor Air Act decreased exposure to second-hand smoke in workplaces, restaurants and bars, leading to a swift decrease in the number of people suffering heart attacks. It is time to develop programs that limit exposure to secondhand smoke in the home, particularly in multiunit housing.

For more information on Denver’s tobacco control activities, please visit the Health Promotion page at Denver Public Health:

<http://denverhealth.org/Services/PublicHealth/HealthPromotion.aspx>. For online copies of the full Surgeon General’s report, executive summary, and an easy-to-read guide on tobacco use and young people, visit www.surgeongeneral.gov.