

Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency

Healthy People, Healthy Communities

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – FORT BRAGG ADVOCATE-NEWS ONLY

Contact: Mary Williamson, Mendocino County Tobacco Control Program

Phone: 707-472-2695

Email: williamm@co.mendocino.ca.us

Tobacco Use by High School Students in Fort Bragg Tobacco Surveys in Fort Bragg

The Mendocino County Tobacco Control Program (TCP) recently conducted youth tobacco use surveys in Fort Bragg and also hosted a class for tobacco retailers. According to Mary Williamson, TCP Project Director, an April survey found that 22% of Fort Bragg High School students were either “regular” or “occasional” tobacco users and an additional 27% had “tried tobacco.” In response to the survey results, Rebecca Walker, Vice Principal at Fort Bragg High School, said that, “Tobacco continues to be an issue in the lives of many of our young people. Many students become complacent about the dangers of tobacco.”

Where do youth smokers get their cigarettes?

Williamson reported that a recent Center for Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey found that 54.5% of those who had smoked in the past 30 days usually got their cigarettes directly from a store, purchasing the tobacco themselves or getting someone to purchase products for them.

Similarly, in the April survey, the approximately 50% of Fort Bragg High School students who had at least tried tobacco products got tobacco from friends, who had often purchased it (78%), got tobacco from family members (48%), who had often purchased it, or got tobacco by asking a “street person” to buy it (33%). Further, almost a quarter (24%) of the students said they could get tobacco at “gas stations,” suggesting that these kinds of stores are particularly easy locations at which to

purchase tobacco products. Emily Husson, Mendocino County Prevention and Planning Unit staff member in Fort Bragg, who works with Vice Principal Walker at Fort Bragg High School, commented on the April results, “Youth don’t think about the addictive qualities of tobacco when they start smoking. The effect smoking has on a young person’s developing brain, social life and wallet are huge.”

Reduce youth access to tobacco products

Minimizing the number of retailers willing to illegally sell cigarettes to kids has been shown to reduce youth smoking. Williamson said that another kind of TCP survey took place in Fort Bragg in February, an Underage Youth Purchase Survey (where minors with valid California ID’s attempt to purchase tobacco products in stores), testing how easy it is for youth in Fort Bragg to get tobacco products from local retailers. Of the 15 tobacco retailers visited in the City of Fort Bragg, 5 sold tobacco products to the minors, a sales rate of 33%. Statewide, the sales rate for California is about 12%.

Fort Bragg class for tobacco retailers

The results of both surveys were shared with local tobacco retailers at a class in May, sponsored by TCP as part of an effort to reduce sales of tobacco to minors through tobacco retailer education. The well-attended and free class, “Selling Cigarettes and Tobacco in California,” was taught by Steven Alari, a Senior Investigator from the California Board of Equalization (BOE). For more information about state tobacco laws, go to the BOE website, www.boe.ca.gov.

What can you do?

If you provide tobacco products to youth, stop. Roughly one-third of all youth smokers will eventually die prematurely from smoking-caused disease. If you currently smoke tobacco products, quit. As Husson tells her students, nicotine addiction is a very difficult addiction to break, but crucial for individual and public health. Get help from the California Smokers’ Helpline, 1-800-NO-BUTTS (1-800-662-8887). For more information about the Mendocino County TCP, the surveys or to share your ideas about how to reduce youth access to tobacco products in Fort Bragg, contact Mary Williamson, Project Director, Tobacco Control Program, 707-472-2695.

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