

and Environment

## **NEWS RELEASE**

Office of Communications Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

4300 Cherry Creek Dr. S. Denver, CO 80246

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 8, 2012

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## Surgeon General's report calls on Colorado to make the next generation tobacco-free

Almost 50 years after the landmark 1964 Surgeon General's Report on tobacco, Dr. Regina Benjamin, U.S. Surgeon General, released a new report calling on the nation to make the next generation 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. In Colorado, an estimated 43 percent of high school students have tried tobacco, nearly 18 percent are current smokers and more than 10 percent use smokeless tobacco.

"The evidence in the new Surgeon General's report clearly demonstrates the need for intensified and sustained efforts to prevent our young people from using tobacco," said Dr. Chris Urbina, executive director and chief medical officer of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. "We know what works and must redouble our efforts to protect the young people in Colorado."

The Surgeon General's report finds that tobacco marketing is a key factor in causing young people to start using tobacco, and nicotine addiction keeps them using it. More than \$1 million an hour is spent on marketing tobacco products in this country and 99 percent of all new smokers come from youth and young adult populations drawn to smoking by this marketing.

Kids and teens see smoking portrayed as normal, even appealing, in the movies they watch, video games they play and websites they visit. In 2010, nearly a third of top-grossing

movies for children – those with G, PG, or PG-13 ratings – contained images of tobaccouse. The report concludes that smoking in movies causes youth to start smoking.

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death, killing more than 1,200 people a day. For every one of those deaths, at least two new youths or young adults become regular smokers. And 90 percent of these replacement smokers smoke their first cigarette before they turn 18. In addition to long-term health effects, this report shows smoking early in life can cause immediate damage to kids' hearts and lungs.

Nationwide and in Colorado, declines in the use of tobacco by youth and young adults have slowed for cigarette smoking and stalled for smokeless tobacco use after years of steady progress. More than 60 percent of young people who tried to buy tobacco have succeeded, despite state laws prohibiting such sales.

The report provides further scientific evidence on young people's sensitivity to nicotine. The younger they are when they start using tobacco, the more likely they are to get addicted and the more heavily addicted they will become. Nicotine addiction will cause about three of four teen smokers to smoke into adulthood.

Comprehensive efforts that include mass media campaigns, smoke-free laws, higher cigarette prices, and school and community initiatives can help prevent kids from ever smoking, the report concludes.

To prevent young people from suffering the consequences of tobacco addiction, the state health department is working with local, state and national partners to reduce Colorado kids' exposure to tobacco and secondhand smoke.

Arvada, Greeley, Steamboat Springs and other communities across Colorado have strengthened smoking restrictions in tobacco shops, restaurant patios and parks, playgrounds and trails. Fountain, Manitou Springs and Steamboat Springs have enacted local ordinances to license tobacco retailers, improving enforcement of illegal tobacco sales.

The department also partners with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the state Department of Revenue and local health departments to reduce illegal tobacco sales to minors. Based on Colorado inspections, the FDA has issued 229 warning letters to retailers statewide.

"With renewed funding for state tobacco control programs and help from statewide partners, Colorado could dramatically reduce youth smoking rates," said Jennifer Ludwig,

chairwoman of Colorado's Tobacco Review Committee. "We could greatly reduce the staggering toll that tobacco takes on our families and communities."

For access to the Surgeon General fact sheet, executive summary and report, please visit <a href="www.COPrevent.org">www.COPrevent.org</a>. For Colorado's strategic tobacco control and prevention plan and activities, go to <a href="http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/tobacco/reviewcommittee/index.html">http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/tobacco/reviewcommittee/index.html</a>.