



Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment

# NEWS RELEASE

Office of Communications  
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Aug. 13, 2012

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## **Tobacco use trend shows slow decline for middle and high school students in Colorado**

DENVER—According to a [newly released CDC report](#) on the 2011 National Youth Tobacco Survey, tobacco use among middle and high school students shows a downward trend from 2000 to 2011 – from 34.4 percent to 23.2 percent for high school students and 14.9 percent to 7.1 percent for middle school. Compared to a decade ago, though, the rate of decline is much slower.

“Overall we’re headed in the right direction, and that’s the good news,” said Celeste Schoenthaler, tobacco program manager at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. “But part of the reason we’re not seeing a faster decline in tobacco use among youth here in Colorado is because kids can find a variety of tobacco products that are appealing and cheap. It’s not just cigarettes. Youth are using products like little cigars and smokeless tobacco products such as chew or snus.”

In particular, the survey found high rates of cigar smoking and smokeless tobacco use among high school boys, with 15.7 percent smoking cigars and 12.9 percent using smokeless tobacco. Cigar smoking among black high school students increased significantly from 2009 to 2011, from 7.1 percent to 11.7 percent.

Many tobacco products are flavored to make them more attractive to new users, even though flavored cigarettes now are prohibited. Tobacco companies can put fruit and candy flavors in cigarette-sized cigars and a variety of smokeless products. Using these products can lead to nicotine addiction and future smoking.

According to the CDC, nearly 90 percent of people who use tobacco became addicted before the age of 18. Tobacco addiction can lead to a lifetime of serious health problems. The best way to prevent tobacco use is not to start.

“Before school starts, we encourage parents, school administrators and others to ensure the tobacco-free school law is enforced at their schools, and that youth understand the tobacco industry advertising and products are intended to hook them for life,” said Schoenthaler.

**Tobacco-free tools are available for free to help youth stay tobacco-free:**

[Teen Quitting Site](#)

[Teen Smoke-Free Texting Program](#)

[N-O-T: Not on Tobacco at the American Lung Association](#)

<http://www.facebook.com/QuitLineCO>

<http://twitter.com/QuitLineCO>

**What can parents, school administrators and communities do to help?**

- Ensure your local schools are enforcing [Colorado’s tobacco-free schools law](#).
- Promote and provide youth with free tobacco-free tools. (See above)
- Help kids become more aware of [tobacco industry marketing tactics](#).

Preventing and reducing youth tobacco use is one of [Colorado’s Winnable Battles](#). Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Colorado. Cigarette use and exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke kill an estimated 4,300 Coloradans each year. The health consequences of tobacco use include heart disease, multiple types of cancer, lung disease, adverse reproductive effects and the worsening of chronic health conditions. In addition to the cost in human lives, cigarette smoking has been estimated to cost Coloradans \$1.3 billion annually in direct health care expenses and lost productivity.