



COUNTY OF ONSLOW

MEDIA RELEASE

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Onslow County Schools and Health Department “Tackle Tobacco”

(Onslow County) Most Onslow County residents believe that tobacco use is the leading health issue facing our community according to a Health Department report. Local and state health statistics confirm this belief.

Although tobacco use has been slowly declining over the last five years, Onslow County has a higher percentage of smokers than the rest of the state. On average, one person out of every three smokes, although smoking tends to be less common as people age.

Tobacco use is widespread among high school students. In fact, most smokers pick up the habit before they graduate from high school. In 2011, more than 15% of North Carolina high school students smoked.

The health effects of tobacco use are well documented. Cancer and many other chronic diseases, such as heart disease and high blood pressure, can be directly tied to using tobacco. From 2006 to 2010, lung cancer was the leading type of cancer death in North Carolina and a majority of those who contract this form of cancer had used tobacco at some point in their lives. Tobacco use can also lead to chronic lower respiratory diseases, such as emphysema, and Onslow County residents suffer from emphysema at a higher rate than residents in other parts of the state.

Because tobacco is a leading cause of preventable disease and sickness and so many teens are using tobacco, the Onslow County Health Department and Onslow County Schools have teamed up to “Tackle Tobacco.” During the November 1 and 8 football games at Jacksonville High School, these agencies will be focusing on educating students, parents, and sports fans about the dangers they face when using tobacco.

“Students are trying tobacco for the first time at a young age, and so it is critical to get the message to them that there are serious health consequences to the decision to use any tobacco product. When you are young and healthy and your friends smoke, it might seem to be the right thing to do. However, later in life that decision can lead to premature aging, serious illnesses, and an early death,” explained Francine Reeves, Clinical Services Director at the Onslow County Health Department.

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Teens and pre-teens who use tobacco have unique health vulnerabilities. For example, the earlier that someone begins smoking, the harder it is for that person to quit and the more health issues he or she will face. One third of teens who smoke will die as a result of that decision. Kids who smoke are more likely to engage in other risky activities, like alcohol or drug use. Kids who smoke reduce their lung growth, which means as adults their lungs may not function fully.

According to Angela Lee, Health Director of the Onslow County Health Department, “Because we understand the long-term consequences of smoking, we want to reach out to this demographic to encourage them to not begin smoking in the first place, or if they currently smoke, we want to give them resources to quit. We are concerned about any issue that risks the health and well-being of students, and tobacco use has numerous negative health consequences that we want teens to understand.”

“Students need to be taught what tobacco use does to the body, but we also want parents to know that they have a lot of power when it comes to shaping healthy behaviors in their children. Parents who smoke are twice as likely to have kids that smoke, so that parental example is extremely important,” said Pamela Brown, Public Information Officer for the Onslow County Health Department.

To learn more about the Tackle Tobacco campaign, contact the Onslow County Health Department at 910-347-2154 or visit the website at www.onslowcountync.gov/health and click on the Community Health Assessment tab. You can also follow local public health news on Twitter @OCHHealthDept.

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