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AZ Takes the Challenge to Protect Kids from Tobacco

Thanks to a new contract from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) is hitting the streets to protect our youth from tobacco. The contract allows ADHS to work with retailers to make sure they are following the rules about the sale of tobacco, including making sure the buyer is old enough to buy it.

“It’s just like alcohol. You have to be a certain age to buy tobacco, but some clerks don’t get the message in training or just plain forget to check IDs,” said Will Humble, ADHS Director. “Our goal with this contract is for all people who sell tobacco - to not let kids buy it. It’s all about training and emphasizing the importance of checking IDs.”

“By joining forces in a partnership with FDA, ADHS is using its experience with law enforcement to inspect retailers to make sure they’re fully complying with the new FDA law that prevents kids from buying cigarettes and smokeless tobacco,” said Lawrence R. Deyton M.S.P.H., M.D., Director, Center for Tobacco Products, FDA. “Since most tobacco users start young, become addicted, and end up with diseases ranging from emphysema and lung cancer to lip and throat cancer, this partnership is saving lives. Those who don’t begin using tobacco products as teens or as children are unlikely to ever start.”

Each day, about 4,000 kids in the United States try their first cigarette and an additional 1,000 kids under 18 years of age become new regular, daily smokers. That’s 400,000 new underage daily smokers in this country each year according to a 2009 SAMSHA report. Arizona is about same as the nation for the number of high school students who smoke - 19.7 percent of Arizona teens smoke and the national average is 19.5 percent. However, only 13.5 percent of the Arizona adult population smokes, compared to 19.8 percent nationally.

The percentage of Arizona youth who report using chewing tobacco has increased slightly over the past few years. A total of 5.1 percent of students report using chewing tobacco within the 30 days prior to taking the survey and 11.7 percent reported using chewing tobacco at least once in their lifetime. That’s up from 3.8 percent 30-day use and the 11 percent life-time use reported in 2006.

In 2009, Congress instructed the FDA to regulate tobacco to reduce the toll on public health. The FDA contracted with several states, including Arizona, to direct undercover buys and conduct Advertising and Labeling inspections to monitor compliance with regulations including: the flavored cigarette ban, age and access restrictions, and promotion and advertising restrictions.

Potential violations are reported to the FDA, which inspects retailers in partnership with State Agencies like ADHS, and it handles the violations. Since the beginning of this contract, the FDA has sent warning letters to [19 Arizona businesses](#). ADHS has conducted more than 500 inspections since the contract began in September. Arizona hopes to be awarded another contract for the coming year.

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