

Educating Students about the Health Risks of Tobacco

The Andrew County Health Department through the Maternal Child Contract (MCH) contract has made its focus to educate the public, with the main focus being school aged children, and about Tobacco and the harmful affects it has on the community.

We work with collaborative members like NWMO Tobacco Coalition, a group of health department members around the NW area, and various other community members working to educate the public and students in the NWMO regional area.

The Andrew County Health Department is currently working with the Andrew County schools using tobacco use prevention programs like Tar Wars for the elementary schools, Teen Against Tobacco Use (TATU) in the Middle schools and Smoke Busters in the High schools. These programs educate the students on the harmful effects of tobacco and how the tobacco companies are targeting children and young adults so they can continue to get new customers.

The data collect during the programs and school surveys indicate that the parent use of tobacco in the home has slightly improved over last year and that the students are well educated on the harmful effects of tobacco and secondhand smoke have on the body.

Data indicates 95% of the elementary students say they will not use tobacco when they get older, but middle school surveys show that 22% of students engage in using tobacco products at 13/14 years of age. Most students indicate using 1 or 2 a day.

The Andrew County Health Department is using the tobacco use prevention groups to address the students at different age levels so to educate them more in each group and to help the students to be knowledgeable about tobacco products before they are approached and they can make their own decisions on weather they want to start. We help them deal with peer pressure and show them how to be a leader in being tobacco free.

There have been students win the tobacco free poster contest at the elementary level and have gone to Washington D.C. and also winners that have won savings bonds of \$50 dollars.

This past year several students from the NWMO area went to the Show-Me Smoke-Free Youth Summit in Jefferson City where there were around 500 high school students that participated from around Missouri. It had informational booths for the students to go to. Speakers that had new products out to show the students and spoke about how the tobacco companies are trying to target children and young adults with fruit flavors and packaging that will disguise the tobacco products so parents won't know what it is. We had a message that we wanted to take to the capitol but it rained that morning and we were not able to, maybe next year because they are planning on doing it again if possible.

We also held our 2nd annual Kick Butts Dodgeball Tournament at the Civic Arena in March on Kick Butts Day. It was a huge success with our number of students and teams growing. We have dodgeball games, educational booths, and other entertainment. One of the displays was a cemetery of chairs with heads of famous people on tombstones telling how they died from smoking or smoking related health problems. Five of the tombstones were of Marlboro spokesmen.