

TOBACCO USE



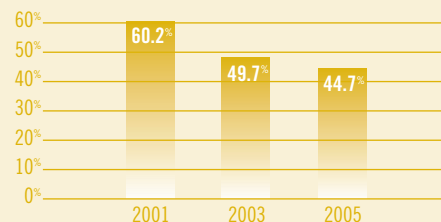
As the number one preventable cause of death in the United States, tobacco use not only puts Rhode Island students at risk for heart disease, stroke, and lung diseases later in life, but also affects them now. Tobacco use can lead to and exacerbate asthma, a significant cause of absenteeism, and has also been linked to use of alcohol and other drugs. Exposure to secondhand smoke is also a health risk for non-smoking students.

Following decreasing trends in tobacco use in previous years, 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data shows a continued drop in the percentage of students who have ever tried smoking (see Graph 1), who smoked cigarettes on one or more of the past thirty days (see Graph 3), and who smoked cigarettes on twenty or

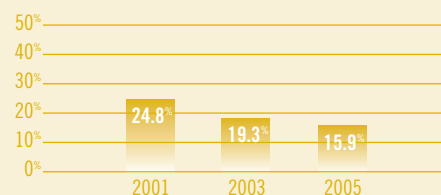
more of the past thirty days (see Graph 3). The percentage of students who have smoked on school property within the past thirty days has also declined (see Graph 4). In addition, about half (51.5%) of current smokers have tried to quit during the past twelve months (YRBS 2005).

Data from the 2004–2005 School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) survey show the number of tobacco related suspensions in Rhode Island schools (see Graph 5). The rates of in school and out of school suspensions are particularly high for high school students. These results will be useful for tracking changes in tobacco use in the future, as well as its effects on school performance and behavior. The National Association of State Boards of Education recommends promoting education and cessation and limiting punitive sanctions for tobacco use.

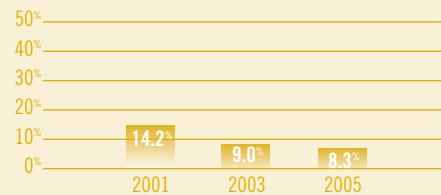
GRAPH 1: Percent of students who ever tried cigarette smoking, 2001–2005 (YRBS).



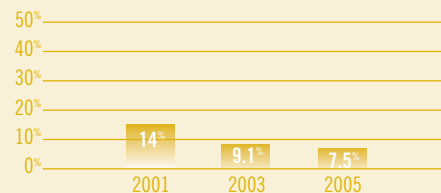
GRAPH 2: Percent of students who smoked cigarettes on one or more of the past 30 days, 2001–2005 (YRBS).



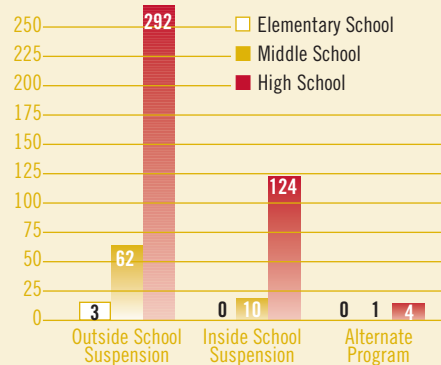
GRAPH 3: Percent of students who smoked cigarettes on 20 or more of the past 30 days, 2001–2005 (YRBS).



GRAPH 4: Percent of students who smoked cigarettes on school property one or more times in the past 30 days, 2001–2005 (YRBS).



GRAPH 5: Number of tobacco use or possession related suspensions statewide, 2004–2005 (SALT).



WHAT SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS CAN DO TO PREVENT AND REDUCE STUDENTS' TOBACCO USE

Schools can adopt several policies, programs, and norms to help prevent and reduce students' tobacco use.

Discussion Questions

District and school leaders can use the following questions to start a conversation in the school community about ways to keep students tobacco free.

1. How do students' overall tobacco use rates in our school or district compare to the rest of the state?
2. How do these rates compare with what we as administrators, teachers, nurses, and student assistance counselors see in the student body?
3. Is tobacco a key discipline or attendance issue in our school or district?
4. How strong are our tobacco use policies? Are these policies properly implemented, enforced, and communicated to the school community?
5. How can we better educate our students and staff on tobacco use, prevention, and cessation?
6. Do we take part in tobacco events, such as Kick Butts Day or the Great American Smokeout?
7. How can we improve our tobacco cessation services to students and staff?
8. How can we better educate families about tobacco use and inform them about community resources around prevention and cessation?
9. What are our goals around tobacco use and how can we achieve them?

Best Practices

Below is a list of best practices—policies, activities, or programs to reduce tobacco use—that other schools have implemented successfully.

- » Develop and implement a tobacco-free school environment policy that bans all forms of tobacco use by students, staff, contract workers, and visitors in school buildings, on school grounds, in school vehicles, and at off-site school events, applicable 24 hours a day.
- » Enforce the tobacco-free school policy consistently.
- » Communicate the tobacco-free school policy to students, families, staff, and visitors through a variety of means, including handbooks, newsletters, and signs.
- » Make information about tobacco cessation available to students and staff in each building in the school district.
- » Implement planned, sequential, skill-based, and evidence-based tobacco prevention education in all grades.
- » Offer tobacco cessation programs to students and staff on a voluntary basis via the 1-800-TryToStop quitline or the www.trytostop.org interactive website.
- » Work with your school's student assistance counselor. Counselors have resources on tobacco prevention, intervention, and cessation strategies.

For additional information contact

Donna Levesque at

Donna.Levesque@health.ri.gov

or Jan Mermin at

Jan.Mermin@ride.ri.gov



For additional ideas, visit www.thriveri.org/issues/tobacco.html#bestpractices.
www.thriveri.org