

## NL YOUTH SMOKING RATES ON THE DECLINE

Since 1999, the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) has been conducted by Health Canada to provide data on tobacco use and related issues. The primary objective of the survey is to track changes in smoking status, especially for populations most at risk, such as 15 to 24 year olds. The survey allows Health Canada to estimate smoking prevalence by province-sex-age groups on a semi-annual basis.

The most recent CTUMS data has reported a decline in the overall current smoking rate among Canadians aged 15 years and older from 25% in 1999 to 17% in 2011. The rates for Newfoundland and Labrador for the same population have declined from 28% to 19%. The rates for the 15 to 19 year old group have seen a dramatic decline moving from 30% in 1999 to 11% in 2011. The rates for the 20 to 24 year old group still remains high at 25% but has declined sharply from the 1999 rates of 36%.

The Western School District has had Smoke-Free Schoolyard Policy in place since August 2006. When asked if this policy has had any effect on student smoking rates at his school, Reuben Austin, vice-principal of Corner Brook Regional High said "We have seen a significant drop in the number of smokers since the smoke-free schoolyard policy came into place. The policy may have something to do with the declining rates, but it also is largely due to the work of the Community Health Nurses with Western Health in promoting a smoke-free lifestyle and a growing concern of the importance of good health."

Some concern has been expressed, however, that there needs to be more done to discourage student smoking than simply ban smoking from school grounds. With this in mind, students in the Western School District have been encouraged to create 30-second radio ads that tell the deadly truth about tobacco and why so many young people are choosing to live tobacco-free lives. The ads were related to the theme, "Life Is Even Better Smoke Free!" and are being played on schools' public address systems and local media outlets during National Non-Smoking Week, January 20 - 26.

Carol Ann Eldridge of St. Peter's Academy in Benoit's Cove has also seen a dramatic decline in recent years. "According to our data, smoking on school property is a non-issue for us now. Our discipline records show that we have not had to deal with one incident of students smoking on or near school property in the past three years." Eldridge feels that this is largely due to the efforts of teachers, parents, guidance counselors, policy creators and all who promote living healthy messages. "Getting students involved in Students Working against Tobacco (SWAT) and creating tobacco free ads are wonderful initiatives that help to reinforce the smoke-free message because the messages come from their peers. It appears that more and more students are realizing the dangers of smoking and, as a result, are avoiding this life threatening activity."

Bill Allan, School Health Promotion Liaison Consultant, Western Health/ Western School District