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## **Smokeless Tobacco Use Remains A Problem** *Students Working Against Tobacco and Tobacco Free Florida raise awareness during “Through with Chew Week”*



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**Milton, Fla.** – Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) and the Florida Department of Health’s Tobacco Free Florida program took the opportunity to raise awareness about the dangers of smokeless tobacco – like chew and dip – during Through With Chew Week. This national public awareness campaign was created to reduce the use of smokeless tobacco among young people. Tobacco Free Florida and SWAT aim to help combat tobacco’s deadly addiction by conducting many educational campaigns, such as Through With Chew Week, which took place February 21-24, 2017.

Although the youth cigarette smoking rate in Florida decreased over 50 percent between 2012 and 2016, the number of Florida high school students who reported current use of smokeless tobacco products decreased only 24.5 percent in those same four years.<sup>1</sup> The disproportionately higher rate of smokeless tobacco use in rural areas is also alarming – current youth smokeless tobacco use is more than three times higher in rural communities than in non-rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Four percent of youth ages 11-17 in Santa Rosa reported current use of smokeless tobacco products in 2016, according to the Florida Youth Tobacco Survey.<sup>3</sup>

“While we’re proud that youth smoking is at an all-time low, the number of young Floridians using smokeless tobacco is decreasing at a dramatically slower rate,” said State Surgeon General and Secretary Dr. Celeste Philip. “We need to do more to educate about the risks and deter our young people of using these products.”

To raise awareness about the dangers of smokeless tobacco use, Santa Rosa County SWAT students participated in a week-long educational campaign at Hobbs Middle School, Holley-Navarre Middle School, Milton High School, and Navarre High School. With Monday being a holiday, the campaign began on Tuesday February 21<sup>st</sup> and continued through Friday February 24<sup>th</sup>. On Tuesday students hung posters with smokeless tobacco statistics and facts, on Wednesday youth made commercials to air on their individual school TV stations, on Thursday SWAT officers conducted a “Chew Spit” blender activity, and on Friday members collected Through With Chew pledge cards from their peers. It is estimated that over 5,000 students and 250 staff throughout the county received SWAT’s anti-tobacco messaging. SWAT County Executive Officers also created two short “Chew Spit” videos for YouTube, which they shared on their social media platforms.

At least 28 cancer-causing chemicals have been identified in smokeless tobacco.<sup>4</sup> Smokeless tobacco users have an 80 percent higher risk of oral cancer and a 60

percent higher risk of esophageal cancer and pancreatic cancer compared to non-users.<sup>5</sup> Apart from cancer, smokeless tobacco users can develop other oral health issues, such as mouth sores, gum recession, tooth decay and permanent discoloration of teeth.<sup>6</sup> The use of some types of smokeless tobacco products is also associated with an increased risk of heart disease and fatal stroke.<sup>7</sup>

Currently, there is no scientific or medical evidence that proves smokeless tobacco use is an effective method to help people quit smoking. Floridians who want to quit any form of tobacco have access to the state's free and proven-effective resources. For more information, please visit [www.tobaccofreeflorida.com/quityourway](http://www.tobaccofreeflorida.com/quityourway)

### **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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### **About Tobacco Free Florida**

The department's Tobacco Free Florida campaign is a statewide cessation and prevention campaign funded by Florida's tobacco settlement fund. Since the program began in 2007, more than 159,000 Floridians have successfully quit using one of Tobacco Free Florida's free tools and services. There are now approximately 451,000 fewer adult smokers in Florida than there was 10 years ago, and the state has saved \$17.7 billion in health care costs. To learn more about Tobacco Free Florida's Quit Your Way services, visit [www.tobaccofreeflorida.com](http://www.tobaccofreeflorida.com) or follow the campaign on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/TobaccoFreeFlorida](http://www.facebook.com/TobaccoFreeFlorida) or on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/tobaccofreefla](http://www.twitter.com/tobaccofreefla).

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS), Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Middle School, High School, and Youth indicators. Florida Youth Tobacco Survey, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS), Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. Smokeless Tobacco and Some Tobacco-Specific N-Nitrosamines International Agency for Research on Cancer Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans Vol. 89. Lyon, (France): World Health Organization, International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2007 [accessed 2015 Feb 10].

<sup>5</sup> Boffetta, P, et al., "Smokeless tobacco and cancer," The Lancet 9:667-675, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Tomar, SL. "Chewing Tobacco Use and Dental Caries Among U.S. Men," Journal of the American Dental Association, 1999, 130: 160.

<sup>7</sup> National Cancer Institute and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Smokeless Tobacco and Public Health: A Global Perspective. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. NIH Publication No. 14-7983; 2014.