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SIX WASHTENAW COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS EARN A+ FOR ADOPTING 24/7 TOBACCO-FREE POLICIES

Chelsea, Dexter, Milan, Manchester, Saline and Ypsilanti Protect Students from Second-hand Smoke

YPSILANTI, Mich., June 27, 2007—Washtenaw County Health Department officials today announced that the Ypsilanti school district has joined five other county school districts in adopting a 24/7 tobacco-free school policy. The new policy prohibits smoking on all school grounds 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and also extends to activities held after school hours and to all outside sporting events.

School districts in Chelsea, Dexter, Milan, Manchester, and Saline adopted similar policies earlier this year. Major school districts that have yet to adopt a 24/7 tobacco-free policy include Ann Arbor, Whitmore Lake, and Willow Run, who have simple “no smoking” policies that do not extend beyond the school day.

“School districts in Michigan are realizing the importance of smoke-free environments,” said DeBorah Borden, Coordinator of the Washtenaw County Tobacco Reduction Coalition. “It’s a perfect opportunity to create a positive and protective environment in which youth can learn behaviors that help them become healthy adults. There are several reports that show if students can make it through middle and high school as nonsmokers, it is very likely they will remain nonsmokers for the rest of their lives,” she said. “A 24/7 tobacco-free school policy goes a long way toward helping delay or eliminate the onset of youth smoking.”

Tobacco use usually begins in early adolescence and almost all “first-time” attempts occur before a student graduates from high school. Tobacco usage statistics show that 82% of adults say they began smoking before the age of 18. Children and adolescents, like adults, quickly develop a tolerance and an addiction to nicotine and similarly find it difficult to quit using tobacco.

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Tobacco is a recognized human carcinogen—a substance known to cause cancer. Tobacco use during childhood and adolescence can produce significant health problems for young people, including decreased physical activity/fitness due to shortness of breath, increased cough and phlegm production, and increased respiratory illnesses. Young people diagnosed with tobacco-related health problems quickly join their adult counterparts in increasing the health care burden to society caused by tobacco use. Exposure to secondhand smoke is also dangerous, as noted by U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona, who said in a highly publicized report that “there is no level of secondhand smoke that is safe.”

Borden said that since students spend a large percentage of their time in school, tobacco-free school policies underscore the importance of shaping student behaviors about tobacco use. The policies also enable positive role modeling by adults and consistent messaging regarding the importance of smoke-free air.

“Schools have the responsibility of protecting students from dangerous products. If they won’t allow alcohol or other drugs on school property, they shouldn’t treat tobacco any differently,” Borden said. “24/7 tobacco-free school policies will substantially eliminate the time and social opportunities students have for learning to smoke or chew and will offer our youth the opportunity to inhale air that is free from pollutants caused by tobacco smoke,” she said.

For additional information about 24/7 tobacco-free school policies, or to learn more about the Washtenaw County Tobacco Reduction Coalition, contact DeBorah Borden at (734) 544-6874 or bordend@ewashtenaw.org.

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