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Contact: Communication Office
Vermont Department of Health
802-863-7281
vdhco@vdh.state.vt.us

Mark Ray
802-862-8261
mray@ksvc.com



HEALTH TIPS ON HOW TO CREATE SMOKE-FREE ZONES Vermont Kids, Parents and Caregivers Learn About Avoiding Secondhand Smoke

Burlington, VT – The Vermont Department of Health is helping children statewide appeal to their parents, other relatives and adult caregivers with a simple message – keeping smoke away from them is the best way to protect their growing lungs and bodies.

The Health Department's "Smoke Free Zone" campaign includes two radio ads featuring children asking their parents to protect them from health risks associated with secondhand smoke. The campaign also includes a guide for creating smoke-free zones (including tips for non-smokers), stickers to signify smoke-free zones, and coloring sheets and water bottles. The Smoke-Free Zone message will be reinforced by a network of community coalitions throughout the state who will participate in the campaign during August and September.

Research shows that creating smoke-free zones work. In a New York State study, the level of cotinine (a biomarker for nicotine, the active ingredient in tobacco) in the saliva of non-smokers was reduced by almost half (47.4%) following a smoking ban. And in response, more and more communities are banning smoking in public places – including outdoor spaces like parks, outdoor cafés and beaches (American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation).

The health risks of secondhand smoke are clear – the U.S. Surgeon General has stated that there is "no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke." Exhaled smoke and smoke from the burning end of a cigarette contains more than 50 cancer-causing chemicals and increases the risk for heart disease and lung cancer. When non-smokers breathe in secondhand smoke, it is like they are smoking themselves. For children, it can cause life-long health problems like asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, and more frequent ear infections and allergies. Babies who are around smokers are more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS.

"Often the most effective health messages can come from those who love you the most," said Health Commissioner Sharon Moffatt, RN, MSN. "That's why we've developed child-friendly materials that can be shared with family and friends while helping everyone create smoke-free zones."

Here are some tips for smokers who want to create smoke-free zones:

- Rules rule. Tell everyone who visits your home or rides in your car, including babysitters and other caregivers, about your no-smoking rule.
- Picture me. Put a wallet-sized picture of your child or loved one on your cigarette pack to remind you of why it's so important.
- The zone. Place smoke-free zone reminders (like stickers) around the house, garage and car.
- Teams work. Join together with another parent who smokes, pledging to keep smoke far away and to watch each other's kids during smoke breaks.

Non-smokers can also create smoke-free zones:

- Tell everyone. Let family, friends and co-workers know that you do mind if they smoke around you and your children. It isn't always easy, but it's important.
- Traveling zone. Make sure everywhere your child spends time, including child-care centers, churches, and after-school programs, are smoke-free.
- Practice no. On your own, practice asking people not to smoke around you and your loved ones so when the time comes, you'll be ready.
- Stick to it. Put a smoke-free zone sticker on your car or front door. Most people will get the message.

More and more Vermonters are banning smoking in the home and the car. Based on the 2006 Adult Tobacco Survey, 63 percent of all Vermont smokers with children banned smoking in their homes and 70 percent banned smoking in their cars. Vermonters who are interested in learning more about smoke-free zones can log on to healthvermont.gov/prevent/tobacco. Anyone interested in quitting can call the Vermont Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669), contact their local hospital's Ready, Set...STOP program, or visit VermontQuitnet.com.

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