

HIGH COST OF TEENAGE SMOKING

A survey of teenage girls aged between 13 and 18 from across Wales has found that 35% admitted to being a smoker and more than half are smoking 30 cigarettes or more a week, and over a third smoking in excess of 50 cigarettes a week. Some teenage girls are spending as much as £40-£50 a week on cigarettes and tobacco.

These are the astonishing results of a survey of teenage girls undertaken by ASH Wales, the voluntary organisation leading the fight against the harmful effects of tobacco in Wales.

Other statistics from the survey found that:

- The average age at which teenage girls started to smoke was 12
- Nearly 70% of the teenage girls surveyed had tried to stop smoking but were not successful
- 19%, or nearly 1 in 5 were spending as much as £20 per week on cigarettes
- Almost a half (46%) felt staying slim was important to them
- 76% of their parents smoked and 68% of their mothers smoked

The overwhelming reason given as to why the girls started to smoke in the first place was because their parents or other family members and friends also smoked, with more than 60% stating this as the main reason.

Nearly 70% of the girls had tried to stop smoking but most stated that the addictive nature of cigarettes meant they were not able to quit their addiction. Problems at home, peer pressure, stress and anxiety were also cited as grounds for not being able to quit smoking successfully.

Tanya Buchanan, Chief Executive of ASH Wales said:

“The results of this survey are quite disturbing for the future health of our young girls in Wales. We already know that smoking is highly addictive and that the younger a person starts to smoke the harder it is for them to quit. It is astonishing that 23% of 15 year old girls are still smoking in Wales

Smoking is an addiction of childhood, not an adult choice and these figures show that more needs to be done to protect children and young people from starting to smoke in the first instance and ensure that the very best support, advice and treatment is available to those who want to quit.

We are pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government has given a commitment to introduce a tobacco control strategy for Wales as this is long overdue and urgently needed but it must be properly funded and address and detail the measures we can take to reduce childhood addiction to tobacco. We also need to learn from other countries where successful interventions have included health promotion advertising and peer led interventions.

Young girls are storing up major health problems for themselves in future years. They are severely damaging their health, with smoking linked to a range of chronic diseases including heart disease, lung cancer, liver disease etc.

Nearly a quarter of the adult population in Wales are smokers and most of these started smoking as children. Every year 6000 people die in Wales as a result of smoking.

NOTES

Please refer all press enquiries to: Carole Jones, ASH Wales at carole@ashwales.co.uk or Tel 02920641101 or 07593538076

Survey conducted by ASH Wales of 176 teenage girls aged 13-18 across Wales in November and December 2009.

ASH Wales is the only voluntary organisation in Wales with the sole task of tackling the ill health caused by tobacco use. Our main aim is to achieve a reduction in, and eventual elimination of, the health problems associated with tobacco use. Further information can be found at: www.ashwales.co.uk.

ASH Wales was established in 1976 as a branch of ASH UK. In 2007 ASH Wales became an independent company limited by guarantee and a charity registered in Wales.