



Tobacco 'too easily available' for children in South Wales

13 August 2008

For Immediate Release

One in five children in South Wales are able to buy tobacco in supermarkets and putting their life at serious risk of smoking addiction, a leading health charity in Wales found recently.

ASH Wales recently surveyed young smokers in and around the South Wales Valleys and found that 8 out of 10 children surveyed have bought tobacco in local shops and 1 in 5 is able to buy tobacco in supermarkets. The survey also found evidence that children are buying single cigarettes in shops - a practice outlawed in 1991.

Daniel Clayton, Youth Tobacco Prevention Specialist at ASH Wales said: "The fact that children can access tobacco so easily is a serious health concern. We know that the earlier children become addicted to tobacco the more likely they are to die a slow and painful death in middle age – taking around 15 years from their life expectancy.

"What is striking about this survey is the ease in which young people can feed their deadly habit. For instance 1 in 5 children can buy cigarettes from vending machines, more than 8 out of 10 are buying cigarettes off their peers in school and more than 1 in 10 can buy tobacco from ice cream vans, burger vans and private dwellings. Most concerning of all is that children are consuming on average 45 cigarettes per week and in some cases up to 200 cigarettes per week. This level of spending on cigarettes is certain to cause long term damage to both the child's health and their bank balance."

The survey also reveals that 13% of respondents may be buying illicit or smuggled cigarettes. This would suggest that children are accessing tobacco from criminal sources. We do not want Welsh children involved in such activity even if they are ignorant to the problem and issues that surround it.

Daniel Clayton continued: "The sale of single cigarettes in the United Kingdom was outlawed in 1991, because of their appeal to young people. 7% of those surveyed claim to have purchased single sticks in either shops or mobile burger and ice cream vans, whilst up to 80% have access to single cigarettes from friends and family. This is scandalous and we need to do all we can at national and local level to stamp this problem out".

The Report on Underage Sales of Tobacco in Wales 2007-2008,

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The 'Survey' took place 1 June 2008 until 30 June 2008. Ffaith Youth members (aged 13-16) anonymously surveyed 109 children from Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent.

compiled by the Wales Heads of Trading Standards, backs up the results found in our survey. Less than half of the Local authorities completed test purchasing, this is where children supervised by Trading Standards attempt to buy cigarettes without identification, but those that did showed high failure rates in shops and supermarkets (around 20-25%). The initiative by the Welsh Assembly to fund Trading Standards to conduct more test purchasing is an excellent one. Test purchasing is an integral part of further tobacco control and the time has now come for tighter restrictions on the retail of tobacco. To help stop our children becoming addicted and then dying from tobacco we need to do all in our power to help them from starting. Making it harder for them to buy tobacco is one of the best preventative steps.

Wales should take a lead and consider licensing retailers to sell tobacco in the same way they are licensed to sell alcohol which carries the same age restriction of 18.

○ **ASH Wales is urging anyone who wants a tobacco free future for our children to log onto www.ashwales.co.uk and send the Health Secretary Alan Johnson an e-card supporting the proposals in the Department of Health Consultation on tobacco control. The consultation is proposing an end to large tobacco displays in stores, banning the use of vending machines and making tobacco come in plain packaging which will help end brand identity and the perceived coolness of smoking. ASH Wales fully supports all three proposals.**

ENDS.

ASH Wales is the only voluntary organisation in Wales solely tackling tobacco use. Our main aim is to achieve a reduction in and eventual elimination of the health problems associated with tobacco use.

Please do not hesitate to contact us regarding this press release or any other tobacco related health matters.