

Chewing tobacco use rises among high-school boys

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San Francisco Giants slugger Pat Burrell sneaks a pinch in the dugout, his lip swollen with a wad of chaw in his TV close-ups.

At the plate, the back pocket of Pablo Sandoval bulges with a round tin of chewing tobacco.

It's hard to miss the signs of a chewing tobacco habit that Major League Baseball can't seem to quit -- a decade after the minor leagues kicked chaw out of their dugouts.

The use of chewing tobacco is rising among high school boys, even as overall tobacco use continues to fall, and anti-tobacco forces want Major League Baseball to step to the plate and ban the substance from its fields.

"Many teenagers worship these baseball players," said Danny McGoldrick, vice president for research at the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. "Clearly, they are role models and they aren't helping."

While overall tobacco use among high schoolers has declined nationally over the past decade -- from 34.5 percent in 2000 to 23.9 percent last year -- more high school boys now chew tobacco -- 15 percent last year vs. 11 percent in 2003, according

to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The trend is even more prevalent among white high school boys: One in every five now use chewing tobacco, according to the CDC, up from 13.2 percent in 2003.

California public health officials also have seen a spike in kids who chew -- 4 percent of the state's high school students reported chewing tobacco in 2008 compared

to 1.8 percent in 2002, said David Cowling, with the California Tobacco Control Program.

In recent years, the tobacco industry has increased its marketing efforts for chewing tobacco, spending \$354 million in 2006. Critics say some new products, such as fruit-flavored dip, are targeted at children -- turning a habit once the domain of older men into an increasingly popular habit among the country's youth.

Terry Pechacek, associate director for science for the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, said the national campaign to snuff out cigarettes from eateries and other public places, coupled with the higher cost of cigarettes because of taxes, has made smokeless tobacco an attractive alternative.

"We're pushing them to smokeless tobacco," said Pechacek, who testified in April before a House committee seeking a ban on chewing tobacco in Major League Baseball. "We're not only seeing a pattern in increased use (of smokeless tobacco), but we're also seeing a decrease in concern about the perceived risk."

Chewing tobacco has been tied to mouth and throat cancers. There is also evidence that chemicals entering the bloodstream from chewing tobacco add



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to the risk of heart disease and strokes.

U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, a longtime anti-tobacco advocate, said Wednesday that Major League Baseball seems amenable to a ban, but the sticking point is with the players.

"These kids see their idols chewing, and they want to chew also," Waxman said. "These televised baseball games provide millions of dollars in free advertising for smokeless tobacco."

It's not known exactly how many major leaguers chew tobacco, but some surveys suggest it's as many as half. The Major League Baseball Players Association has said it is willing to talk about a ban but won't be in position to do so until contract talks next year.



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