

## **Will the government crack down on candy-coated carcinogens?**

**CALGARY** – Smoke-Free Calgary is urging the federal government to ban flavoured additives in all smokeless tobacco products.

At Mount Royal University (MRU) a survey of sports teams found smokeless tobacco use common practice in the hockey locker room and practice arena. In fact, use of chew or spit amongst MRU hockey players raised enough concern, that a school health educator and the coach created a tobacco free policy for the team for the 2009-2010 season and offered support for players to stop using smokeless tobacco.

There are two common forms of smokeless tobacco: chew, a loose leaf tobacco, sold in pouches and snuff, a finely ground tobacco sold in powder form. Both are used orally, tucked in between the cheek and gum to enable nicotine absorption.

Many of the MRU players using smokeless tobacco started at a young age. Some were urged to try it by a teammate, while others were just curious. Since smokeless tobacco now comes in candy and fruit flavours like cherry, apple, peach and vanilla it is easy to start chewing and quickly become addicted.

"In Alberta we are especially concerned," says Ashley Jensen of the Canadian Cancer Society. "Young people in our province have much higher rates of smokeless tobacco use than in the rest of Canada. We need to be vigilant as the tobacco industry's strategy to recruit new users is clearly working."

Using sweet flavours to counteract the negative taste, the industry is ensuring that smokeless tobacco is becoming more popular. Use of smokeless tobacco is especially problematic among teenage boys. A survey by Health Canada in 2007 shows that 17% of Alberta males, ages 15 to 19-year-old, use smokeless tobacco. This is almost double the national average of 9%.

Despite its enticing flavours, smokeless tobacco is dangerous. With deceptive packaging that looks more like candy or gum, teenagers often underestimate the risks of chewing tobacco. However, the same cancer-causing chemicals in cigarettes are also found in smokeless tobacco. Health Canada warns that these products contain 28 known carcinogens and increase risk of mouth and throat cancer. Smokeless tobacco can also cause serious tooth and gum disease.

Health Canada has been tasked with providing the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health more information about the use of smokeless tobacco among Canadian youth. Currently, flavoured smokeless tobacco is excluded from Bill C-32, which prohibits the tobacco industry from targeting youth with candy flavours and appealing packaging.

The dubious strategy to use flavour additives to entice young people into a deadly addiction is one of many reasons the tobacco industry needs tough regulation. Smoke-Free Calgary urges a ban on flavoured smokeless tobacco to prevent the industry targeting our youth.

**For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:**

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