

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PREVALENCE OF SMOKING IN GEORGIA DOWN BY 10 PERCENT

ATLANTA (GA) – The Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health is pleased to announce that the prevalence of smoking in Georgia decreased by 10 percent in 2006. According to data from the state’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), the average rate of smoking among Georgia’s adults was 19.9 percent in 2006, compared to 22.1 percent in 2005. Tobacco use remains a leading preventable cause of death and disease in Georgia and claims more than 10,000 adult lives each year. The use of tobacco in Georgia also costs the state approximately \$5 billion in direct adult and infant medical expenditures and productivity losses each year.

“The data shows that efforts made by our agency and our community partners between 2000 and 2005 influenced healthier behaviors among the State’s smoking population,” said Dr. Stuart Brown, Director of the Division of Public Health. “However, we know much more work needs to be done before we are able to further impact the prevalence of smoking in Georgia and the negative affects it has on the State’s economy and citizens.”

The Georgia Tobacco Use Prevention Program, established in 2000, is one of the primary drivers in helping decrease the state’s overall smoking prevalence. In collaboration with the 18 public health districts, nonprofit health agencies and various partners and youth groups, the program is aimed at reducing the health and economic burden associated with tobacco use in Georgia. Activities established under the program have enabled communities across the state with an opportunity to impact the smoking prevalence in their area through education, awareness and other outreach mechanisms.

Reducing tobacco use among the state’s teenage population is a priority goal of the Georgia Tobacco Use Prevention Program. In Georgia, seven percent of middle school students

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and 17 percent of high school students smoke cigarettes which reflects a national trend of rising rates. In 2005, the Division of Public Health began collaborating with school systems across the state to help implement the 100% Tobacco Free School Policy which seeks to combat teenage tobacco use. The policy prohibits tobacco use in school buildings, on school grounds, in school buses or other vehicles used to transport students. A total of 15 school systems in Georgia have adopted the policy with many more to follow suit. The 100% Tobacco Free School Policy also uses components such as youth groups, surveys, signage and media campaigns to educate students about the health risks associated with cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. Since 2001, 50 youth groups and coalitions statewide have been trained on how to advocate for policy change and conduct education campaigns.

Another activity that has served as a catalyst in reducing Georgia's smoking prevalence involves the adoption of the Georgia Tobacco Quit Line. The service was established in 2001 and provides cessation services and resources to Georgians seeking to quit all tobacco products. The Quit Line offers services to tobacco users ages 13 and older, including the hearing impaired and Spanish speaking callers. Since its inception, more than 82,000 adults have contacted the Georgia Tobacco Quit Line and more than 300 calls have been received by the Youth Quit Line.

Other activities that have contributed to the decline of the state's smoking prevalence include:

1. Enforcement of the Georgia Smokefree Air Act of 2005
2. The increase in the excise tax on a pack of cigarettes from 12 cent per pack to 37 cent per pack in 2003
3. More than 65 local jurisdictions adopting no smoking/tobacco ordinances which restrict tobacco use
4. Continued support from the American Lung Association, the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association with policy efforts and cessation programs.

The Division of Public Health reminds current smokers and tobacco users that it is never too late to quit and doing so could save lives and dollars. For more information about how to quit smoking, please contact the Georgia Tobacco Quit Line at (877) 270-STOP in English, (877) 2NO-FUME in Spanish and (877) 777-6534 for the hearing impaired. Additional information about the dangers of tobacco use can be found at: www.livehealthygeorgia.org.