

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For information, contact:
Mike Mullet, 404-657-1388
mjmullet@dhr.state.ga.us

SMOKING IN GEORGIA NOW BELOW NATIONAL AVERAGE

ATLANTA (GA) – Fewer Georgians are smokers compared to two years ago, confirms a recent report that also lists smoking in the state below the national average. Health officials point to tobacco reduction efforts that include a state Quit Line, ongoing education, and a new state law that prohibits smoking in public places.

The report published November 11 by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 20.1% of Georgians ages 18 and older are current smokers, down from about 23% in 2003. Nationwide, 20.9% of adults, or 44.5 million people smoke cigarettes. The study also revealed that 22.4% of Georgia men and 17.9% of women smoke, compared to 25.8% of men and 19.9% of women in 2003. Information about Georgia in the CDC study is based on data gathered from the 2004 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS).

"This report confirms that tobacco cessation efforts in Georgia are working," said Dr. Stuart Brown, director of the Division of Public Health. "Initiatives such as the Georgia Tobacco Quit Line are helping Georgians kick the habit. We hope to see this trend continue."

Launched in 2001, the Georgia Tobacco Quit Line is a free resource for tobacco users. The Quit Line (**1-877-270-STOP; Spanish: 1-877-2NO-FUME; TTY: 1-877-777-6534 for the hearing impaired**) provides counseling, a resource library, support and referral services for Georgia tobacco users ages 13 and older. Callers speak with health care professionals who develop a unique plan for each individual. To date, nearly 45,000 Georgians have called the Quit Line for help. Smokers have reported marked success in their efforts to go smoke-free thanks to the Quit Line.

Georgia also recently enacted the Smokefree Air Act of 2005. Effective July 1, the law prohibits smoking inside most public areas and outlines specific guidelines for allowing smoking

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in and around establishments that serve the public. By eliminating smoking in public places, the Smokefree Air Act will reduce Georgians' exposure to secondhand smoke and decrease the number of tobacco-related illnesses and deaths in the state.

The CDC report cites several factors that are encouraging tobacco cessation and preventing tobacco initiation, including interventions offered by national Quit Lines, smoke-free worksite policies, increased tobacco excise taxes, countermarketing campaigns, and insurance coverage for tobacco cessation services.

U.S. health leaders have set a national goal to reduce cigarette smoking among the adult population to 12% or less by the year 2010. So far, only Utah has reached that goal with 10.5% total smokers.

Being smoke free is part of the Live Healthy Georgia campaign launched by DHR in partnership with Gov. Sonny Perdue. The statewide outreach initiative encourages Georgians to follow five steps for better health and well-being: *Eat Healthy, Be Active, Be Smoke Free, Get Checked and Be Positive.*

For more information about quitting tobacco and other ways you can live healthier, visit www.livehealthygeorgia.org.

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