

June 13, 2007

Prince George Citizen

Letter to the editor:

On June 1 you printed an article "Spit It Out: Teens take to tobacco" to highlight the public health issue posed by spit tobacco use among youth. On June 4, the National Smokeless Tobacco Company replied with a letter to the editor defending their products.

We are disappointed that the National Smokeless Tobacco Company would downplay the health effects of their products and their marketing tactics. Spit tobacco contains nicotine, a highly addictive substance. Nicotine from spit tobacco is absorbed more slowly and at higher doses than from cigarettes, and stays in the blood stream longer. The amount of nicotine in one dip or chew can deliver up to five times the amount found in a single cigarette. Spit tobacco contains over 3,000 chemicals, including 28 known carcinogens.

Spit tobacco use is a health issue in BC. The Clean Air Coalition of BC, which includes the Heart and Stroke Foundation of B.C. & Yukon and the BC Lung Association, recently held focus groups with youth and young adults about their use and knowledge of spit tobacco. The youth questioned were very familiar with spit tobacco and its emergence as one of the new drugs of choice among their peers. Spit tobacco users are more likely to be youth that participate in certain organized sports such as hockey and baseball or youth from First Nations communities. Youth in rural communities are more likely to use it than their urban counterparts. With respect to sport-oriented youth, the Alcohol-Drug Education Service (ADES), through its Tobacco Free Sports program (www.tobaccofreesports.ca) is taking the lead in BC in combating tobacco use in sporting environments.

The BC Spit Tobacco Education Program (BCSTEP) is bringing the issue of spit tobacco use and its health risks to the attention of those in the medical and dental professions as well as those that use it. Prolonged spit tobacco use leads to increased risk of cancer of the oral cavity, oesophagus, pharynx, larynx, stomach and pancreas, tooth and gum disease, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and leukoplakia (a disease of the mouth).

Tobacco companies are turning more of their marketing efforts to spit tobacco products, also known as smokeless tobacco, as a response to an increase in smoking bans and the social stigma of cigarette use. Much of their target marketing is to youth – such as in the sales of flavoured spit tobacco - in an effort to have them addicted and become life long users of tobacco products.

For information to help people quit using spit tobacco products, please contact QuitNow Services. Go to www.quitnow.ca for resources on-line or contact QuitNow By Phone at 1-877 455 2233.

Sincerely,

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Northern Health Authority

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