



Health Promotion Board
3 Second Hospital Avenue Singapore 168937
Tel. 6435 3500
Fax. 6438 3848
www.hpb.gov.sg

31 May 2012

ABOUT 80% OF SMOKERS HOOKED BEFORE THEY TURN 21

To reach out to youths in Institutes of Higher Learning, the Health Promotion Board is launching a health engagement programme with ITE Colleges that taps on students' strengths and networks to build a health-conscious and smoke-free lifestyle.

Singapore, 31 May 2012: The majority of smokers in Singapore pick up the habit before they are allowed to vote, according to figures from the National Health Survey 2010.

2. To encourage the younger generation to embrace healthy habits and a smoke-free lifestyle, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) is launching a project in collaboration with Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs), as the school campus is where youths spend a considerable amount of their time.

3. Rolling out first at the ITE Colleges, this novel health engagement programme aims to harness students' strengths and peer networks to make health a pervasive and sustainable component of the school experience.

4. While Singapore's national smoking prevalence continues to be one of the lowest in the world at about 14 per cent, the percentage of young adult smokers below 30 years old has increased in recent years, from about 12 per cent in 2004 to 16 per cent in 2010.

5. HPB's research reveals that the spike can be attributed to factors like peer pressure and the misconception that smoking is 'cool'. Some youths also ignore anti-smoking messages if they come from figures of authority.

6. Said Health Minister Mr Gan Kim Yong: "According to the National Health Survey 2010, 25 per cent of young men aged between 18 to 29 smoked. To improve access to mentoring support and smoking cessation services, HPB has introduced programmes in targeted settings such as at National Service (NS), workplaces and Institutes of Higher Learning to raise awareness on the ill effects of smoking and help young people quit the habit."

7. For example, HPB has been working with the Singapore Police Force's Training Command at the Home Team Academy to provide smoking cessation programmes and peer support groups for full-time NS men who wish to quit smoking, as well as developing similar programmes with the Singapore Civil Defence Force and Singapore Armed Forces. In the workplace setting, HPB launched a Workplace Smoking Control Programme in companies and trade associations last year to help employees who smoke break the habit. Today, in the school setting, HPB is introducing an integrated health programme that will involve, among other things, deploying nurses as Student Health Advisors in all ITE Colleges to encourage students to live a smoke-free lifestyle.

8. Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer, HPB, said: "As we mark World No Tobacco Day, research tells us that about 80 per cent of smokers are hooked even before they turn 21. As a result, youths remain a priority group when it comes to HPB's National Tobacco Control Programme. However, we want to reach out to youths in ways that celebrate their strengths by empowering them, instead of a list of top-down do's and don'ts."

9. To do this, HPB's health engagement programme with ITE Colleges aims to empower youths, so that they become change agents and health advocates, lobbying confidently and passionately for greater participation in healthy activities and a smoke-free environment within their campuses as well as in the neighbourhoods around their colleges.

10. Developed after an in-depth study by HPB to understand the psyche of today's youths, their health habits and lifestyle, HPB's health engagement programme with ITE Colleges includes:

- **Forming a Health Alliance with Student Councils**

To tap on students' strong sense of belonging to their campus as well as desire to create a bright future for themselves, HPB is forming a Health Alliance with the Student Councils. This way, the youths are empowered to work with HPB and members of its youth health advocacy group, Youth Advolution for Health (YAH), to build their own needs-based health promoting projects, within the school as well as in the neighbouring community.

- **Supporting and funding Youth Health Advocacy Projects**

To encourage youths' natural tendencies to explore and find innovative solutions to pertinent health issues, HPB will invite students to submit proposals for health advocacy projects, and provide funding and consultancy advice. Each project can be funded with up to \$1,000.

- **Training and nurturing peer advocates**

To harness the power of peer influence in a positive way, HPB will work with school management and staff to set up a Health Promotion Club as a co-curricular activity. Club members will be equipped with essential skills and knowledge to conceptualise, plan and strategise outreach projects. Upon completing the training course, these club members may be deployed within and beyond the school campus to spread, for example, anti-smoking and obesity management messages.

- **Disseminating healthy messages through social media**

To ride on students' strong affinity with social media, HPB has introduced pervasive health promotion efforts via youth online portal Breathe.sg. These include interactive games, online videos, blogs and mobile phone apps.

11. In addition, HPB will partner ITE management and staff to create a health promoting environment in the campus and integrate health messages in the schools' Lifeskills

curriculum. HPB will also deploy nurses as Student Health Advisors in all ITE colleges to provide health counselling.

12. HPB plans to implement this customised health engagement programme at all IHLs by 2015.

13. Beyond schools and the public sector, Singapore's fight against tobacco use needs a joint effort among the community as well as private businesses. To show support of World No Tobacco Day on 31 May, major supermarket chains such as NTUC FairPrice, Giant, Cold Storage and Sheng Siong are voluntarily imposing a one-day ban on the sale of all tobacco products.

Issued by Health Promotion Board