



## WILL COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT & COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

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News media calls to Vic Reato: Media Services Manager at (815) 727-5088

Agency Website: [www.willcountyhealth.org](http://www.willcountyhealth.org)

Twitter: WillCoHealth

#### **SURVEY SAYS ... WILL COUNTY YOUTH SMOKE LESS THAN PEERS STATEWIDE** **YOUTH TOBACCO PREVENTION PROGRAM MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

JOLIET – Will County youth are ahead of the curve when it comes to getting the anti-tobacco message.

Data published in the 2010 Illinois Youth Survey shows Will County children smoke less often than peers from across the state. The survey, now administered by the University of Illinois Center for Prevention Research and Development, examined smoking prevalence of high school and grade school students.

According to the survey, nearly 22,000 Will County children and adolescents smoke. The totals include: 1% of sixth graders, 3% of eighth graders, 12% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 24% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

Statewide, 1.9% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 7.9% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders smoke. Some 14% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and more than 25% of Illinois high school seniors admit to smoking cigarettes.

Will County Health Department Executive Director John Cicero believes his agency's Tar Wars smoking prevention initiative deserves credit for helping area students to make informed decisions about tobacco and the inherent health risks. Will County is one of only five Illinois jurisdictions to offer Tar Wars, which is available to area schools free of charge.

"Tar Wars is an effective prevention and education tool initially developed by the American Academy of Family Physicians," Cicero said. "It is designed to reach 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders with information that helps them to understand the risks associated with tobacco use. There is limited funding for the program, but we've been able to reach lots of impressionable kids with the help of educators and school administrators across the county."



**Public Health**  
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*Main Office*  
501 Ella Avenue  
Joliet, IL 60433  
Ph 815.727.8480  
Fx 815.727.8484

*Community Health Center*  
1106 Neal Avenue  
Joliet, IL 60433  
Ph 815.727.8670  
Fx 815.727.8852

*Eastern Branch Office*  
44 Towncenter  
University Park, IL 60466  
Ph 815.727.8803  
Ph 708.534.0800  
Fx 708.534.3455

*Northern Branch Office*  
323 Quadrangle Dr.  
Bolingbrook, IL 60440  
Ph 630.679.7000  
Fx 630.679.7015

The Tar Wars curriculum features an hour-long classroom presentation emphasizing personal responsibility. Program presenters focus on the short-term, image-based consequences of tobacco use, costs associated with smoking, and advertising techniques tobacco companies use to market harmful products to youth.

“We’re working hard to reach young students so that they can make educated decisions later in their development,” Cicero said. “We want them to have the tools they need to make positive decisions regarding their health.”

Will County Tobacco Control and Prevention introduced Tar Wars to area schools in 2007. The program has been presented to more than 5,500 Will County grade schoolers during 219 separate presentations. Program coordinator Jenny Blair is still lining up presentations for the current academic year.

Tar Wars has been presented in more than a dozen Will County school districts, including: Joliet District 86, Troy CCSD 30-C, Valley View 365U, Plainfield CCSD 202, plus districts in New Lenox, Channahon and Mokena. New schools on the list for the 2011-2012 academic year include Stevens intermediate School in Wilmington and Patterson Elementary in Naperville. Nearly a dozen area private schools have also benefited from Tar Wars.

Specially trained Lewis University College of Nursing students help Blair extend program reach. Lewis students presented the curriculum in five county schools during the 2010-2011 academic year.

For more information about Tar Wars, or to schedule a Tar Wars presentation, telephone 815-774-7312.