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Opinion

Editorial: Health sign for teens

Tuesday, December 30, 2008 3:00 AM

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Healthy sign for teens A decline in teenage smoking is a positive sign for North Carolina and the health of young people who are forgoing tobacco use now and, more than likely, will continue to do so in the future.

The gains cited recently by researchers at UNC Chapel Hill's medical school showed up among two critical age groups — middle school and high school students. In both groups, teenage smoking is at record lows. It's no coincidence that the decline in these age groups follows an increase in anti-smoking activism by teenagers themselves. In Rowan County, for instance, the Youth in Action Against Tobacco Council recruits young people to help spread information about the risks of tobacco use to schools and the community at large. In addition to urging teens and preteens to resist the temptation to smoke or use tobacco, the council also helps spread the word about resources that help current smokers kick the habit.

The group and others like it around the state are funded through the state Health and Wellness Trust Fund, which gets payments from the 1998 national settlement with tobacco companies. The decline in teen smoking shows that the trust fund money directed toward these efforts (\$17.1 million this year) is well spent, especially as it helps spread the anti-smoking message among more young people. Most tobacco users pick up the habit in their youth. A decline in teen tobacco use now should translate into a healthier population in the future — and medical savings for society as whole.

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