

# Public Health Education

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## Mission

To provide information and services that result in a more informed public and healthier children, adults, and families.

## Summary of Activities

The **Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH)** provides public health education focused on prevention of unhealthy behavior and changing or abating existing unhealthy behavior. Public health programs supported by the ISDH include the Minority Health Initiative, Childhood Hazards Education & Prevention, AIDS Education & Prevention, and the Governor's Council of Fitness & Sports.

The ISDH Maternal and Child Health Services division is responsible for improving the health of women, infants, children, and adolescents by providing education and prevention services throughout the state. The division works with the Indiana Perinatal Network, an alliance of private- and public-sector individuals and organizations committed to improving health care for all mothers and babies in Indiana. They provide seminars, workshops, and other education and prevention activities in each county in Indiana.



*Indiana Osteoporosis  
Prevention Initiative*  
Growing Strong Bones

Other ISDH public health education efforts include “Project RESPECT”, which is funded in part by a federal Abstinence Education Block Grant. Project RESPECT funds are distributed to community groups to support abstinence education in regard to the sexual behavior of adolescents and teens. Project RESPECT efforts feature the slogan “Sex Can Wait.”

The ISDH Office of Tobacco and Health (OTAH) works to prevent Indiana's youth from using tobacco, as well as to decrease current tobacco use through education, prevention, and cessation efforts. The OTAH assists tobacco control community groups

and conducts public relations campaigns. School-based OTAH programs such as “Tar Wars” have involved over 300 schools and 14,000 youth.

The **Coroners' Training Board** also provides public health education by establishing statewide standards for death investigation procedures and providing appropriate training to county coroners and their deputies.

## External Factors

Indiana was one of forty states to enter a November 1998 settlement to resolve a class action lawsuit filed by states against the tobacco industry to recover the costs of providing health services to persons suffering from the adverse effects of smoking. Indiana has chosen to utilize funds received from the tobacco industry settlement for health care purposes and programs. This new funding source has allowed an expansion of tobacco education and smoking cessation projects, and has provided funding for innovation in addressing other public health concerns.

Public health education programs must be designed to respond to new and emerging public health threats with programs and activities that help inform the public, and assist with changing behaviors that may result in avoidable negative health consequences.

Indiana's elected coroners have a diverse set of experience and skills, requiring the Coroner's Training Board to provide flexible and responsive education and training regarding death investigation procedures.

## Evaluation and Accomplishments

The ISDH Office of Tobacco and Health launched the Comprehensive Tobacco Communication Campaign, which has shown significant success. A study of 3,000 youth in grades 5-9, conducted both before and after the campaign, yielded the following:

- ◆ 83% report seeing the anti-smoking commercials sponsored by the campaign, which feature “Gaspin the dog”.
- ◆ 26% report that it is now harder to obtain cigarettes.
- ◆ Smoking rates of student in grades 7-9 have dropped.
- ◆ Television is the best avenue to reach the target population to affect attitudes and behaviors.



“Gaspin the Dog”

The ISDH has initiated a Nicotine Replacement Program in which 27 state-funded community health centers distribute free nicotine patches to clients in need of smoking cessation services. Individual and group support services are also available through this program.

The Coroners Training Board launched its first ever state-wide training and certification program, which included approximately 300 coroners and deputy coroners. Indiana is the first state in the nation to carry out such a training and certification program.

## Plans for the Biennium

Public health education plans for the ISDH include expansion of successful campaigns, activities and programs using the funds from the tobacco settlement as well as additional federal dollars. Maternal and Child Health Services funding will continue to be used for education and prevention activities and programs for improving the health of women, infants, children, and adolescents.

