

# SURVEILLANCE UPDATE



North Carolina Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch /April 2008

## WHAT ABOUT SPIT TOBACCO?

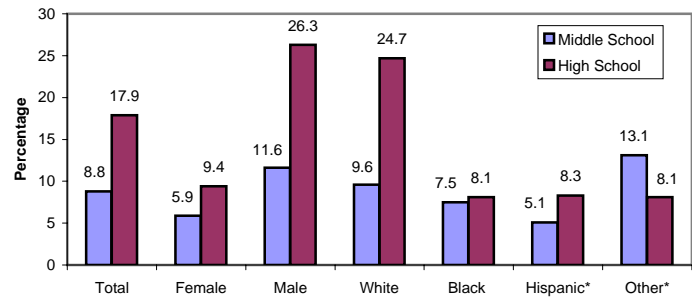
Tobacco continues to be the leading cause of preventable death in the United States and in North Carolina. Smokeless tobacco, commonly known as chewing tobacco, snuff or dip, is a leading delivery method for nicotine. But spit tobacco not a safe alternative to cigarette smoking. Spit tobacco contains 28 known cancer causing agents, is a known cause of oral cancer, is associated with leukoplakia (a lesion of the soft tissue that consists of a white patch or plaque that cannot be scraped off), and recession of the gums. Spit tobacco is addictive, just like cigarette smoking, and young people who use smokeless tobacco are more likely to become cigarette smokers.<sup>1</sup>

Among North Carolina youth, smokeless tobacco use is a serious problem. In 2007 -- as measured by the 2007 N.C. Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS)- 8.8% of middle school students and 17.9% of high school students reported ever using smokeless tobacco. What's more, 2.3% of all middle school students and 8.6% of all high school students said they currently use chewing tobacco, snuff or dip, such as Redman, Levi Garrett, Beechnut, Skoal, Skoal Bandits or Copenhagen. That's enough students to fill 119 middle school buses and 698 high school buses.<sup>2</sup>

Current spit tobacco use varied by gender and ethnicity. More boys (3.3% of middle-schoolers and 14.5% of high-schoolers) reported current use of smokeless tobacco than girls (1.3% of middle-schoolers and 2.4% of high-schoolers).

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Percentage of N.C. middle and high school students who reported ever using smokeless tobacco<sup>1</sup>, by gender and race/ethnicity: N.C. YTS 2007



## "SMOKELESS DOES NOT MEAN HARMLESS"

The North Carolina Spit Tobacco Education Program (NCSTEP) is funded by the Health and Wellness Trust Fund to serve as a statewide spit tobacco prevention and cessation resource. The mission of NCSTEP is to assist the statewide tobacco prevention and control network in reducing spit usage rates among North Carolina's youth. The program provides consultation and information about spit tobacco; develops educational and school materials and resources; provides training for the medical, dental, public health, and school communities; and provides presentations to schools and youth groups. For more information, please contact:



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Whites (2.7% of middle-schoolers and 12.0% of high-schoolers) were more likely to use smokeless tobacco than blacks (1.5% of middle-schoolers and 3.3% of high-schoolers) and Hispanics\* (1.4% of middle-schoolers and 3.1% of high-schoolers). These data indicate that white males are the primary risk group for smokeless tobacco use throughout North Carolina.

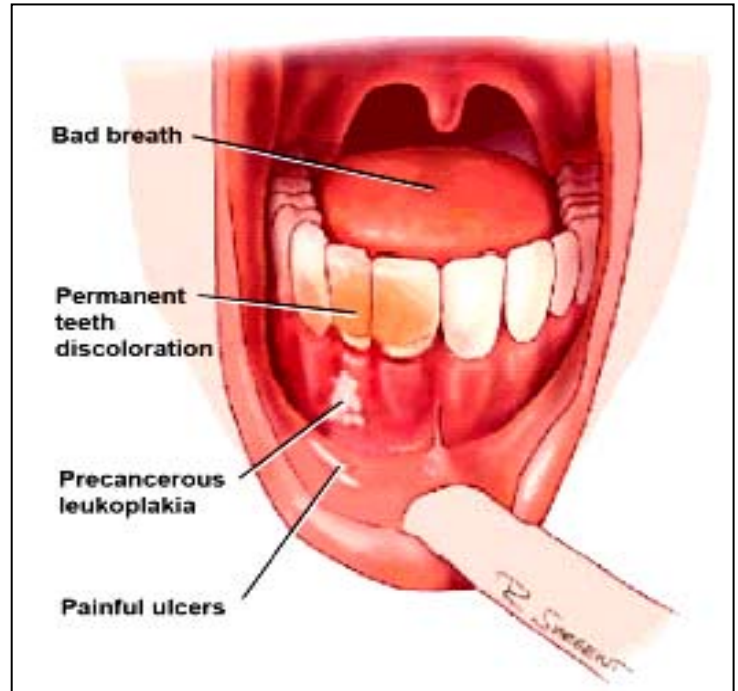
Current spit tobacco use increased by grade level (age) in middle school, but not in high school. One and a half percent of 6<sup>th</sup> graders reported current smokeless tobacco use, followed by 2.3% of 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 3.1% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders. In high school, 6.9% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders reported current smokeless tobacco use, compared with 9.0% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 9.6% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders and 9.2% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Specific, 95% confidence interval data are available at the N.C. YTS website:

[www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov/data/yts/yts.htm](http://www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov/data/yts/yts.htm)

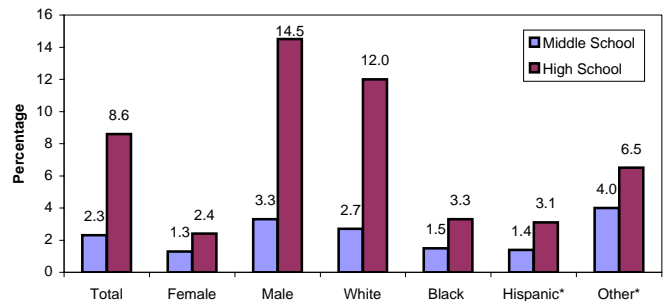
Although differences exist between genders and ethnicities, when analyzing spit tobacco use it is important to examine differences among North Carolina's geographic regions. Students from North Carolina's Western Region (3.6% of middle-schoolers and 15.3% of high-schoolers) were more likely to currently use smokeless tobacco than students from either the Central Region (1.7% of middle-schoolers and 7.1% of high-schoolers) or the Eastern Region (3.3% of middle-schoolers and 8.6% of high-schoolers).

North Carolina's current high school smokeless tobacco use is still higher than that of the rest of the nation. Among middle school students, North Carolina's students were equal with U.S. students who use smokeless tobacco: 2.6% of U.S. and N.C. middle school students reported current spit tobacco use.

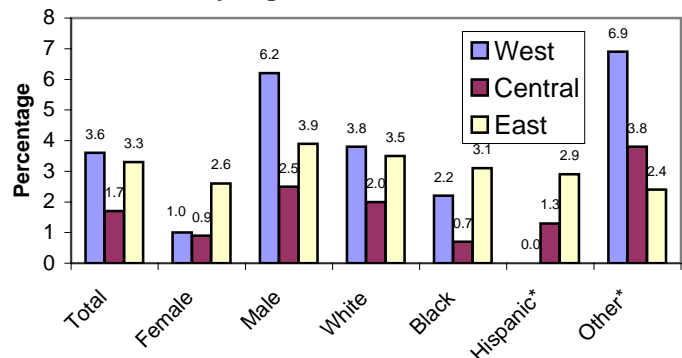
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**Percentage of N.C. middle and high school students who report current smokeless tobacco use<sup>2</sup>, by gender and ethnicity, N.C. YTS 2007**



**Percentage of N.C. middle school students who report current smokeless tobacco use, by region, N.C. YTS 2007**

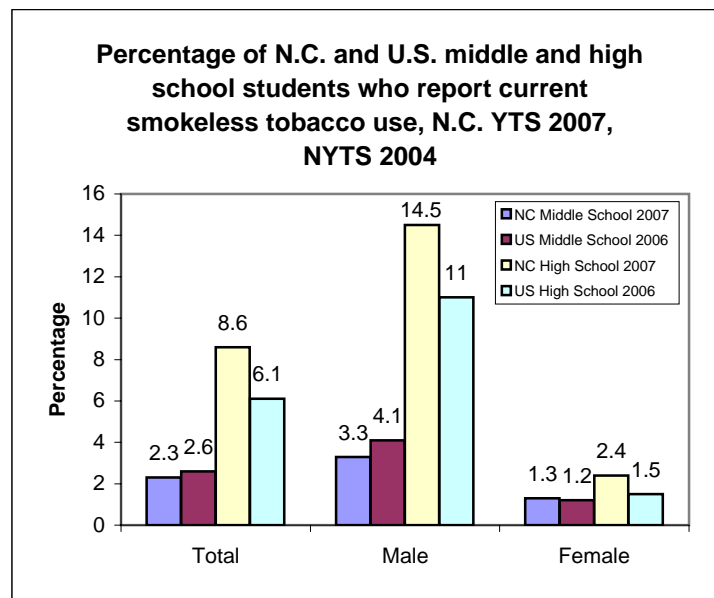
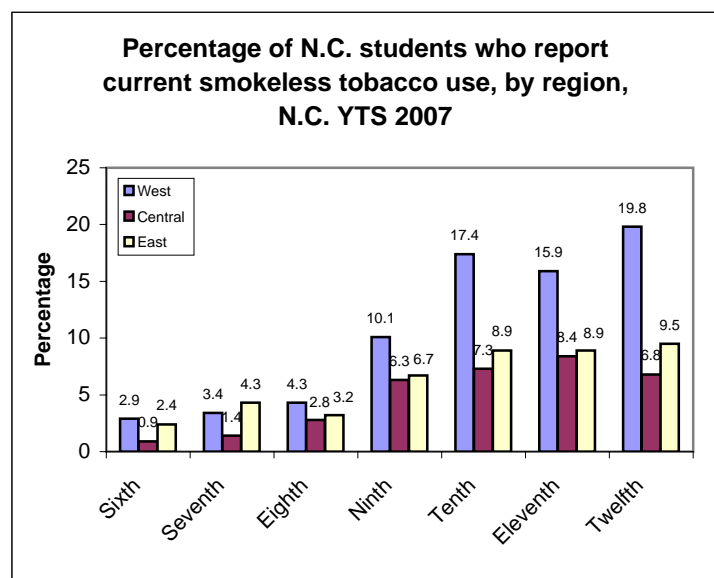
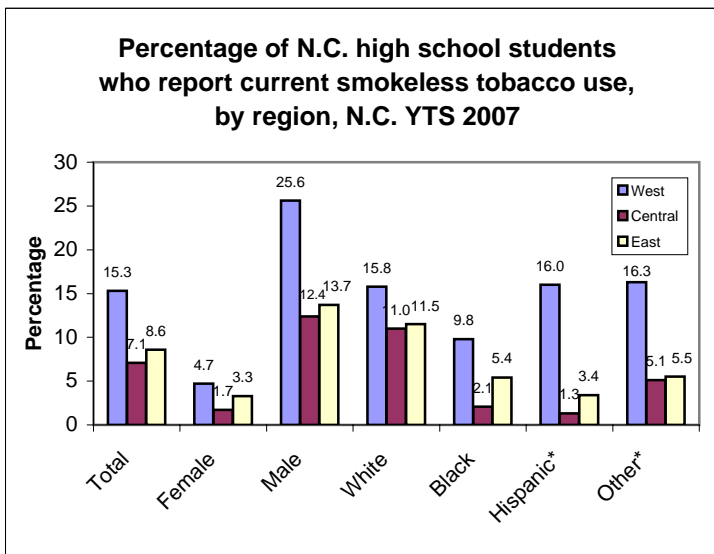


In 2004, only 6.1% of all high school students in the U.S. reported current smokeless tobacco use, whereas 8.6% of N.C. high school students reported current use of smokeless tobacco. That means, in 2007, North Carolina's high school students were 41% more likely to use spit tobacco than their peers throughout the nation.

These results are particularly troubling, because spit tobacco use rates have not significantly declined from 1999 to 2007 compared to cigarettes. Across gender and ethnic groups, smokeless tobacco use actually increased from 1999 to 2007 (7.9% to 8.6% among all high school students, 1.8% to 2.4% among high school females, 14.0% to 14.5% among high school males, 9.7% to 12.0% among white high school students, and 2.6% to 3.3% among black high school students). There has been a decline among Hispanic high school students, from 8.7% to 3.1%. In spite of this, from 2005 to 2007, current smokeless tobacco use decreased among all high school groups except females, which increased slightly from 2.3% to 2.4%.

These data indicate that smokeless tobacco use among youth is a key area to which North Carolina needs to pay particular attention. North Carolina must implement more evidence-based programs that confront smokeless tobacco use, especially in the Western Region. Spit tobacco use must not become a greater problem for North Carolina; current cigarette smokers should not quit smoking only to use smokeless tobacco as a type of substitute, allowing cigarette smoking to decline while smokeless tobacco use continues to grow.

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For more information on tobacco use prevention and control, please visit the CDC Office on Smoking and Health's Tobacco Information and Prevention Source page at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco).

1 Ever using smokeless tobacco indicates that a student has used smokeless tobacco, even once or twice.

2 Current smokeless tobacco use indicates that a student has used smokeless tobacco within the last 30 days.

\* Use caution when interpreting; results based on small sample size.

Specific, 95% confidence interval data are available at the YTS website.

**References:**

1. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Smokeless Tobacco Fact Sheet. 2004. [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/factsheets/smokelesstobacco.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/factsheets/smokelesstobacco.htm)

2. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. [www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/resources/data/statisticalprofile/2007profile.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/resources/data/statisticalprofile/2007profile.pdf)



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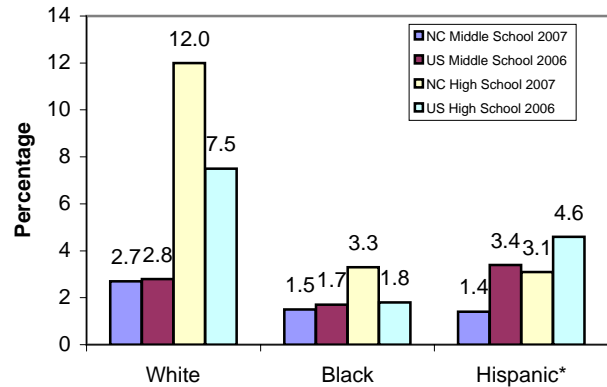


For more information, please contact:  
 Health and Wellness Trust Fund at:  
[www.healthwellnc.org](http://www.healthwellnc.org)

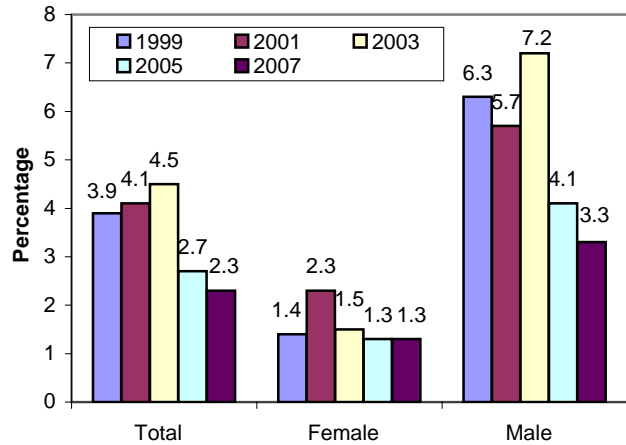


More information on North Carolina Youth Tobacco Survey (N.C. YTS) is available at [www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov/data/yts.htm](http://www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov/data/yts.htm)

**Percentage N.C. and U.S. middle and high school students who report current use of smokeless tobacco, by race/ethnicity, N.C. YTS 2007, NYTS 2004**



**Percentage of N.C. middle school students who report current smokeless tobacco use by year, N.C. YTS**



**Percentage of N.C. high school students who report current smokeless tobacco use, by year, N.C. YTS**

