

- NEWS RELEASE -

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**ASH ALARMED BY SHARP RISE IN ALBERTA TEEN SMOKING
FIGURES**

Edmonton - ASH is alarmed by a thirty percent relative increase in smoking rates among Alberta teenagers aged 15-19 reported in today's Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey. Smoking rates among Alberta teens rose from 16 percent of those aged 15-19 in 2004 to 21 percent of the same age group in the first six months of 2005 according to the survey of 1,751 Albertans aged 15 and over, including 418 Alberta teenagers.

"This increase is alarming and we can't afford to wait until we have all the answers" said Les Hagen, executive director. "The Alberta Government must take immediate action to curb tobacco use among Alberta youth before we end up with a long-term increase in adolescent smokers. Today's signal can easily become tomorrow's trend".

ASH believes that price discounting by Canadian tobacco companies is largely to blame for the increase. Youth are particularly sensitive to price changes and youth smoking rates soared following the tobacco tax rollbacks in the mid-1990s.

"We urge the Alberta government to increase cigarette taxes by at least two dollars per pack and to take other measures to curb price discounting by tobacco companies" said Dr. Roger Hodgkinson, chairman. "Alberta has the eighth lowest tobacco taxes in Canada compared with other provinces and territories. We cannot allow tobacco companies to flood the market with cheap cigarettes in order to attract young smokers".

"The tobacco industry is attempting to undermine the previous gains that have been made in reducing tobacco use in this province and it needs to be stopped in its tracks" he added.

Smoking rates among Albertans plummeted following a \$2.25 per pack tobacco tax increase in 2002. The 2002 tax increase contributed to a 20 percent relative reduction in overall smoking rates and a 25 percent reduction in smoking rates among teenagers.

"Based on previous experience, the Alberta government knows exactly what to do in order to dramatically reduce youth smoking" added Les Hagen. "Armed with this knowledge, we hope that the government will stand up for the health of young Albertans by approving a substantial tobacco tax immediately. The Premier promised to make Albertans the healthiest people in Canada, starting with our youth. The government can act on this promise by taking immediate action to curb the apparent sharp rise in teen smoking".

ASH is Western Canada's leading tobacco control organization.

The CTUMS data can be viewed at www.gosmokefree.com.

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