Oregon adult, youth smoking drops 41 percent in decade

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Oregonians smoked an estimated 2.6 billion fewer cigarettes between 1996 and 2006 as consumption decreased 41 percent during that time, according to a report from the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Public Health Division. Oregon outpaced the nation by 10 percent, as cigarette smoking dropped 31 percent in the United States during the same period, according to "Oregon Tobacco Facts," released by the Oregon Tobacco Prevention and Education Program (TPEP). Tobacco use has declined among adults, youth and pregnant women since 1996 when Oregon voters approved a tobacco tax increase, which in part funds the state's anti-smoking effort. "We've come a long way in 10 years, but tobacco use still takes a tremendous toll on Oregonians," said Mel Kohn, M.D., state epidemiologist in DHS. "We must continue to help people quit and prevent kids from starting to smoke." Kohn said Oregonians are four times more likely to die due to tobacco-related causes than from motor vehicle accidents, suicide, AIDS and homicide combined. "With nearly a quarter of all deaths in Oregon attributed to tobacco use, this is truly a health epidemic," he said. "And unlike many diseases, this situation is entirely preventable." Here are some of the 1996-2006 changes in Oregon tobacco consumption patterns: â€¢ 22 percent fewer adults smoke; â€¢ 59 percent fewer 8th graders smoke; â€¢ 46 percent fewer 11th graders smoke; and â€¢ 30 percent fewer pregnant women smoke, meaning that potentially 17,500 fewer infants were exposed to the effects of prenatal smoking. Exposure to secondhand smoke also declined during the past decade, according to the report. In a survey, 87 percent of Oregon adults said that people should be protected from secondhand smoke. More than 95 percent of employees are covered by the Oregon Clean Indoor Air Act, which prohibits smoking in most workplaces. Almost all indoor workplaces, including bars, are required to be smoke free by January 2009. Oregon Tobacco Facts is available online.