

Coalition teaching teens the dangers of smoking

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LEE COUNTY: Public health care providers hope a state grant will help the nearly 20-percent of county adults who smoke and the countless others who are affected by it.

When it comes to the dangers of smoking, the writing's been on the wall.

"We know it not only hurts - it kills," Lee County Health Department's Brendan Donohue said.

The Lee County Health Department hopes a new \$600,000 state grant will help slash the number of smokers and smoking-related deaths in Lee County.

They've formed the new Tobacco-Free Lee Coalition, bringing together kids and community leaders.

"It's not the smoker we're trying to get at, it's the tobacco industry," said Mike Moreno of the Delta Project.

Moreno, and anti-tobacco advocate, is teaching Lee County students how the tobacco industry uses deliberate marketing techniques to lure teens into smoking.

"There is definitive evidence that shows that someone under the age of 18 is more likely to smoke the entirety of their life and the tobacco industry knows that," he said.

But the kids learned they can use the same techniques to prevent other young people from lighting up.

"You can quit and there are people out there who are working against the industry," student Katie Donohue said.

Tobacco-Free Lee is also targeting women because statistics show more women than men smoke in Lee County.

"We want to have women receive a tobacco intervention each and every time they go to their physician, especially pregnant women," said Brendan Donohue.

The grant money will also provide free programs, products and services to help smokers quit.

"It's not just your own usage, but you affect others by second hand smoke and tertiary smoke. It stays in the environment for many, many years," Sally Jackson of Lee Memorial Health System said.

In November, Lee Memorial Health System will ban smoking both in and outside all their facilities.

The coalition wants other businesses and all county buildings to follow suit.

To learn more about the program, you can contact Donohue at (239) 332-9651.

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