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HEALTH DEPARTMENT GRANT WILL HELP CHILDREN BREATHE EASIER Mount Vernon and Yonkers residents to get help making their homes smoke-free

This spring, an estimated 250 households in Mount Vernon and Yonkers will be hearing in person about the benefits of making their homes smoke-free. A \$5,000 mini-grant from the American Lung Association and POW'R Against Tobacco will enable health department staff to go door-to-door in some neighborhoods in Mount Vernon and Yonkers to encourage residents to sign a Smoke-Free Home Pledge.

“The harmful effects of second-hand smoke are now well documented,” said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “Children are especially at risk from exposure to second-hand smoke, and we are doing all that we can to make sure parents understand the dangers of smoking at home. By signing a Smoke Free Pledge, residents agree to keep tobacco smoke out of their homes when children are around. This will help children, especially those with asthma and respiratory conditions breathe easier.”

The Health Department encourages all county residents to join its efforts to reduce tobacco smoke in homes by signing a Smoke Free Home Pledge. The Smoke Free Pledge can be found at www.westchestergov.com/health/SmokeFreePledge.htm. In 2002, Westchester won a national award for the number of residents signing a smoke-free home pledge in which they agreed not to smoke at home when children were around.

Quitting smoking is no easy feat. Many smokers attempt to stop more than once before they completely succeed. As a means of support for those who are trying to kick the habit, the Health Department has launched a Quit Smoking Blog on its website where residents can log on to share their experiences and successes with

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one another. Having the opportunity to connect with others who have the same goal can make the process of quitting a bit easier. To access the Quit Smoking Blog, visit www.westchestergov.com/health/TobaccoBlog.htm

Almost 20 percent of Westchester County residents 18 and older describe themselves as current smokers. Although the majority of smokers do not allow smoking in the home, many still do. Nationally, almost 60 percent of children aged 3 to 11 years, or almost 22 million children, are exposed to second-hand smoke. About 25 percent of children aged 3 to 11 years live with at least one smoker.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no risk-free level of second-hand smoke exposure. An estimated 150,000 to 300,000 new cases of bronchitis and pneumonia in children aged less than 18 months, resulting in 7,500 to 15,000 hospitalizations, is attributed to second-hand smoke exposure. Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work increase their heart disease risk by 25 to 30 percent and their lung cancer risk by 20 to 30 percent. Secondhand smoke may also cause sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), ear problems, and increase the frequency and severity of asthma attacks in children.

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States and is considered responsible for more than 440,000 deaths each year. The risk of dying from lung cancer is 23 times higher among men who smoke than among men who never smoked. Among women it is 13 times higher. The risk of several other types of cancer is also greatly increased by smoking. Cigarette smokers are 2 to 4 times more likely to develop coronary heart disease than nonsmokers and are about twice as likely to suffer a stroke. Smokers are ten times more likely to die from chronic obstructive lung disease.

The majority of adult smokers started smoking by the age of 18. Every day, an estimated 3,900 young people under the age of 18 try their first cigarette. The main focus of County ongoing efforts has been to prevent young people from starting to smoke.

The Westchester County Department of Health is an active member of the POW'R Against Tobacco Coalition, a four county coalition that was founded in 1992 to reduce the risk of tobacco-related diseases by lowering the prevalence of tobacco use in Putnam, Orange, Westchester and Rockland Counties. In 2001, Westchester County became one of only three counties in the State to receive an "A" grade from the American Lung Association for its anti smoking efforts.

For more information, please call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department website at www.westchestergov.com/health.