

## POLICY & PRACTICE

### Media-Savvy Teens Smoke Less

Teens who know how to detect subliminal prosmoking messages are less likely to smoke, research from the University of Pittsburgh found. Previous studies have shown that adolescents are swayed by glamorous depictions of smoking in advertising, movies, and TV shows. The Pitt researchers surveyed 1,200 students' attitudes and knowledge at a suburban, middle-class, mostly white high school, using a Pitt-developed, validated, smoking media literacy (SML) scale. SML scores were assigned based on responses to 18 state-

ments such as "advertisements usually leave out a lot of important information." The median SML score was 6.8 (out of 10). Students with scores above the median were half as likely to smoke or to be susceptible to starting in the future. As little as a 1-point decrease in the SML score was associated with a 30% increase in a student's likelihood to smoke or start. Lead author Dr. Brian Primack, assistant professor of general internal medicine, said the study supports the idea that schools and others can target teens for media literacy training. The re-

sults might not be generalizable to more diverse groups of students, however, he said. The Pitt paper appeared in the October issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

### More Opt-Outs Mean More Pertussis

States that make it easier for parents to opt out of vaccinating their children have a much higher incidence of pertussis, according to a study in the Oct. 11 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Forty-eight states allow exemptions for either religious or personal beliefs. It appears that the percentage of children eligible for vaccination but who

are granted exemptions for personal issues is growing—rising from 1% in 1991 to 2.5% in 2004. States that made it especially easy to secure an exemption had the highest exemption rates, and a 90% higher incidence of pertussis, according to an unadjusted analysis, the authors reported. Vermont topped the list, with a pertussis incidence of 12.8 per 100,000. Massachusetts, Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin followed. Even after adjusting for education, urbanization, and income, the results showed that pertussis incidence was associated with states' policies, wrote the authors. "States should examine their exemption policies to ensure control of pertussis and other vaccine-preventable diseases," they said.

### Medicaid Enrollment, Spending Slows

Spending by the states under the Medicaid program increased 2.8% during the state fiscal year 2006, the smallest increase in about a decade, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation's Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured. Improvements in the economy and the implementation of the Medicare prescription drug benefit in 2006 may have helped to keep costs lower, according to the results of the 50-state survey released by the Kaiser Family Foundation. There was also an enrollment slowdown in the program, with only a 1.6% increase. "When the economy improves, it is natural for Medicaid spending and enrollment growth to subside because fewer people turn to the program for assistance," Diane Rowland, executive vice president of the Kaiser Family Foundation, said. "But with the continued growth in the uninsured population, Medicaid remains on the front lines for coverage [of] low-income children and adults."

### FCC Changes Children's TV Rules

Officials at the Federal Communications Commission recently clarified the rules regarding requirements for children's television programming. Under the changes, TV broadcasters that have multiple stations must ensure that they air additional children's programming, and only half the shows can be repeats aired in the previous 7 days. The changes also clarify restrictions on the use of Web site addresses in programming. Under the new FCC rules, Internet addresses that do not offer a substantial amount of non-commercial content will be counted against the network's commercial time limits and must be kept separate from its programming. The changes were praised by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. The new rules revise rules issued by the FCC in 2004 and are based largely on a compromise agreement among the four major broadcast networks, major children's networks, cable operators, advertisers, and a coalition of children's advocacy groups. "Children should have access to educational as well as entertaining television programs. We also need to protect kids from the over-influence of television advertising, [which] has been linked to childhood obesity and lower academic performance," said Dr. Michael Brody, chair of the academy's television and media committee.

—From staff reports



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