

Tobacco Free Sports Launch
Minister of Health George Abbott
May 31, 2006

Check Against Delivery

Good afternoon students, athletes, coaches, parents and guests.

As Minister responsible for health, I'm very proud to be here today to see all of our young athletes here ready to compete. I know all of you have worked very hard to earn your way to represent your region in the BC Secondary Schools Rugby Union Provincial Championships.

Well done to all of the teams from across the province that are competing. Your efforts here today reflect the goals of what we are striving for in our province as we move towards 2010. Through ActNow BC, the province will be one of the healthiest provinces ever to host an Olympic and Paralympic Games.

We want to see a 20 per cent increase in the number of British Columbians who are physically active — so be sure to encourage mom and dad to walk with you to your practices or your games next time.

We want you to eat your 5 fruits and veggies every day. Why? Because by eating 5 fruits and vegetables a day you improve your overall health and reduce your chances of developing many preventable diseases that impact quality of life, like some types of cancer, Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

We also want to ensure that expectant mothers receive the information and support they need to have the healthiest babies possible.

But today, it's reducing the amount of tobacco use that I want to talk about and we want to decrease use in British Columbia by a further 10 per cent. This is a lofty goal since we already have one of the lowest tobacco use rates in the country.

That brings me to today — World No Tobacco Day. World No Tobacco Day has been observed annually every May 31 since 1988. Activities vary from country to country but all activities are designed to help you, your family, your friends and your loved ones take action against tobacco use

We all know the harms that tobacco can bring. We probably all know someone who has suffered from the effects of tobacco — diseases such as throat, mouth and lung cancer and even heart disease.

Every year in B.C. tobacco kills almost 6,000 people and it's not just from smoking. Second hand smoke from your friend or at home. Even spit or chew tobacco can cause cancers of the mouth, throat, and larynx. We also can't forget the dangers of second-hand smoke in cars. Simply opening the windows cannot prevent the dangers associated with second-hand smoke.

I'm proud to announce a new partnership with PacificSport. PacificSport is the lead non-governmental organization responsible for the development of some of our top Olympic and Paralympic athletes and the delivery of sport performance programs throughout B.C. I want to recognize Roger Skillings who is in the audience today. Roger is the CEO of Pacific Sport in Victoria and I welcome him here.

Today, I am announcing a five-year \$550,000 partnership with PacificSport to help reduce the use of tobacco among British Columbians. Tobacco Free Sports is a world-wide recognized movement that started in 2003 and continues to grow. Tobacco use has a direct link to decreased sports performance in addition to the negative effects of tobacco use whether you are an active participant or a spectator.

Nearly all smokers tried their first cigarette before the age of 19 or before they finished high school. We are here today with 800 of B.C.'s youth who are athletes, and role models to their peers. Research tells us that if we can keep our youth tobacco free until they're 19, they most likely will never start using tobacco.

It's our job as parents, coaches and role-models to not only support them to be tobacco-free, but to model a tobacco-free lifestyle ourselves. Helping our young to be tobacco free now and teaching them to lead healthy, active lives will help prevent future chronic illnesses in their adult lives.

Together, with our partners PacificSport and BC's health authorities, Tobacco Free Sports is helping British Columbians be the healthiest people in the world by eliminating tobacco from our sports and our lives. Good luck to all of the teams participating today. Be your best. Be tobacco free!

Thank you.