



**For Immediate Release:**

February 16, 2012

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**February 19-25 is Through with Chew Week**

(Omaha, NE) — Not all tobacco is smoked and the week of February 19-25 – national Through with Chew Week – is an excellent time to call attention to that fact and smokeless tobacco use in Nebraska.

“Smokeless tobacco is not a safe alternative to smoking and is even more habit forming because it contains a higher concentration of nicotine than cigarettes,” said Mary Crosby, Tobacco Prevention Specialist at PRIDE-Omaha, Inc. and media chairperson for the Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition.

According to the 2010 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders, 10% of Nebraska high school males used smokeless tobacco within the past 30 days. Nebraska’s combined total (male and female) is 6%.

“Smokeless tobacco use is more common in Nebraska than the nation as a whole,” said Crosby. “Young adults who try smokeless tobacco for the first time are often drawn by the flavors: mint, vanilla, or apple, and milder tastes. Smokeless tobacco can cause oral cancer, especially in the cheeks, gums, and throat. It can also lead to other oral problems, such as mouth sores, gum recessions, tooth decay, bad breath, and permanently discolored teeth.”

For Nebraskans who are ready to quit using smokeless tobacco, free Quit Spit Kits are available by texting IMREADY to 39649 (standard texting rates apply). Also, MyLastDip.com features free Web-based programs available to help chewers quit. One program targets 14 – 25 year olds, the other targets those 26+. Chewers can also call the free and confidential Nebraska Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-784-8669, or visit [QuitNow.ne.gov](http://QuitNow.ne.gov) for resources and information.

The Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition is a collaborative effort that focuses on keeping youth from starting to use tobacco, reducing access to tobacco products, and increasing awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke. It's funded by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services/Tobacco Free Nebraska Program as a result of the tobacco master settlement agreement.