

Youth cannabis use 'scary'

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over last two to three years. One could look at this and say you've launched the healthy weight strategy and the rate is going up, but it tells you how complex the issue is and also the amount of intensive resources that it's going to require."

The survey showed the percentage of students who were physically active for more than 90 minutes a day, five or more days a week, has dropped from 58 to 54 per cent among Grade 7 students, and from 44 to 39 per cent for Grade 10s.

The decrease in physical activity could be influenced by Halton students' proximity to school, with the number of students who live within walking distance to school down from 2006.

"In 1971, 85 per cent of youth rode their bikes or walked to school, now it's 15 per cent," said Burlington Councillor Rick Goldring.

"The fact you have to encourage people to walk to school, it's staggering."

The 2009 survey included a new question about school transportation. The results showed that 41 per cent of Grade 7s and 48 per cent of Grade 10s never walk, bike or rollerblade to school.

Pointing to the region's Sustainable Halton plan, Nosal said, "When you're looking at healthy community design, the whole issue is your (ecological) footprint, with transportation and cars versus walking and bicycling."

"All the issues we know are going to make a difference either have not had time to act yet. We're talking about five, 10, 15 and in the case of Sustainable Halton, 20-year plans to try and deal with this particular issue. More and more time is being spent on healthy community concepts and the design of communities."

Burlington Councillor Carol D'Amelio said the rise in youth obesity rates could be influenced by community safety concerns.

"A lot of this stems from the fact that parents are afraid to have their children outside. And that's unfortunate in a region

that's the safest region in the country," she said.

Despite the rise in overweight and obesity rates, the survey wasn't all bad news for the region's youth.

Alcohol use, including binge drinking, has declined since 2006. The latest survey showed a six per cent drop in alcohol use among Grade 7 students, which sits at 17 per cent and an eight per cent drop among Grade 10s, with 62 per cent having at least one drink in the last 12 months.

The number of students who have ever tried a cigarette has dropped in both age categories, but the number of current smokers has remained the same with one per cent of Grade 7s and 13 per cent of Grade 10s smoking regularly.

Cannabis use among youth has remained the consistent over the three-year period—a finding that has some councillors concerned.

"It's an absolutely scary statistic," said Oakville Councillor Jeff Knoll of the 2 per cent of Grade 7s and 25 per cent of Grade 10s who use cannabis. "From what my understanding is, some people don't think smoking marijuana is a problem, they think it's fine, it's not like drinking, it's not like smoking cigarettes, it's not like speeding. There's no repercussion," he said.

Nosal said a report about cannabis use will be presented to council in November.

He compared marijuana use to cigarette use in the region two decades ago, when Nosal began working in Halton. "Youth smoking rate at that point was approaching 30 per cent, the feeling was, what are we going to do about it?"

He said through provincial and local programs, the regional smoking rate decreased, explaining that two big reasons tobacco use came down was the rising cost of cigarettes and legislation, including no smoking bylaws.

"Similarly with marijuana—it's not in the same group as tobacco—but some of those rules apply."

'In 1971, 85 per cent of youth rode their bikes or walked to school, now it's 15 per cent.'

—Councillor Rick Goldring

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