

October 23, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE FROM OREGON PARTNERSHIP

Contact: Pete Schulberg
503-244-5211

YOUNG GIRLS IN OREGON DRINKING ALCOHOL AT HIGHER RATES THAN YOUNG BOYS

OREGON PARTNERSHIP REACTS TO LATEST STATE STATS: “Public Health Crisis”

(Portland, OR) A snapshot of underage drinking in Oregon shows that 34% of 8th-grade girls reported drinking alcohol in the last month, compared to 30% of 8th grade boys.

Results from the annual Oregon Healthy Teens Survey highlight a recent trend showing that young girls are drinking at higher rates than young boys.

“The statistics reveal the extent of what can rightly be called a public health crisis in our state,” said Judy Cushing, President/CEO of **Oregon Partnership**, a non-profit organization providing substance abuse prevention education and treatment referral.

“Drinking puts girls’ health at risk in a number of ways. Differences in female physiology mean that teen girls feel greater affects from alcohol and encounter alcohol-related problems faster. But many don’t see it that way. They want to ‘keep up’ with their boyfriends.”

Cushing points that national surveys say one in six girls who report trying the sweetened “alcopops” (Mike’s Hard Lemonade, Doc Otis’ Hard Lemon Flavored Malt Beverage, among others) were sexually active after drinking.

In the state-wide survey by the Oregon Department of Human Services, alcohol use among total 8th graders went up slightly from the 2005 survey – from 30.1% to 31.9%.

Among 11th graders, 44% say they have consumed alcohol in the past 30 days, which is a slight drop from 47.4% in 2005. 11th grade binge drinking is also down – from 28.8% to 24.9%.

According to national research, adolescents who start drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking at 21.

Cushing emphasized that many kids aren’t just having one drink. Nearly one in four 11th graders say they binged on alcohol in the past month – consuming five or more drinks in a row with a couple of hours.

Years of medical research attest to the short and long-term consequences of the dangerous combination of kids and alcohol.

“Adolescents who drink can cause long-term, irreversible damage to their still-developing brains,” said Cushing. “And it kills. Alcohol is involved in suicide, homicide and unintentional injuries, the leading causes of death among youth.”

Oregon Partnership has recently launched its “Face it, Parents” media campaign – funded by the Oregon Department of Human Services - which encourages adults to be pro-active with their children about the realities of underage drinking.

Research points out that parents’ words and actions play an important role in whether their children drink. What can parents do? Talk regularly with their kids about the dangers of underage drinking, dispel the myth that most kids drink, establish family rules for children’s behavior, and make sure adults will be around at youth parties.

Oregon Partnership is supporting a 10-cent increase in the state's beer tax - which hasn't been raised in 30 years – to help pay for alcohol abuse prevention and treatment programs.

Also in the 2006 Health Teens Survey:

*Percentage of 8th graders who say it would be “very easy” to get beer, wine or hard liquor: 35%.

*11th graders who say they rode in a vehicle driven by a teenager who had been drinking alcohol: 13.8%.

To see the complete survey:

www.dhs.state.or.us/dhs/ph/chs/youthsurvey/ohtdata.shtml#2006

About Oregon Partnership:

Oregon Partnership is a statewide nonprofit that has worked to promote healthy kids and communities for well over a decade by raising awareness about drug and alcohol issues, providing prevention education in classrooms, and 24-hour crisis lines for people needing help. To learn more, visit www.orpartnership.org.