

MEDIA RELEASE - Te Hauora O Te Hiku O Te Ika

For immediate use

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Whānau congratulated for going smokefree at rugby games

All the rugby union, rugby league and touch rugby clubs of the Muriwhenua region have formally agreed to make their playing fields smokefree when under-18 year olds are competing on them.

The agreement – the brainchild of Henare Anderson, Health Promotion Officer of the Māori Health Provider, Te Hauora O Te Hiku O Te Ika – will affect the eight clubs north of Mangamuka.

The rate of smoking among Northlanders is 25 percent higher than the national average.¹ It's related to 25 percent of all deaths in Northland, and to almost half of all Māori deaths in the region (47 percent). Hospitalisations in Northland due to smoking are one and a half times the national rate.²

Henare Anderson says one of the aims of the Te Tai Tokerau Māori Health Plan is to 'normalise' tobacco-free environments. He says that by agreeing not to smoke on the sidelines during a game, parents and other whanau are being great role models for their children who look to them for examples on how to behave.

"When the players look around at the sidelines they won't see a single person puffing away – that helps to 'de-normalise' smoking in the eyes of our tamariki".

Mr Anderson says the playing fields of four clubs are already smokefree and four are in the process of changing their rules so their fields will become auahi kore before the end of the year.

Mr Anderson says although some smokers were a bit put out at first no-one has actually defied the agreement. "We've had a few who haven't realised the new culture and have lit up, but once it has been explained to them, they've stubbed out their cigarettes."

More importantly there has been no drop off in support for the players from whānau who smoke. "They are learning that they can get through a game supporting their young, without a cigarette, and the world doesn't end."

¹ Ministry of Health. 2007. Smoking Prevalence Rates, Census 2006. Wellington: Public Health Intelligence, Ministry of Health.

² Ministry of Health. 2007.4DHB Tobacco Control Project, Northland Epidemiology. Unpublished report.

The chairperson of the Mangonui Rugby Association, Sonya Butters, says young sportsmen and women have the absolute right to a smokefree environment.

"It's really great to see all the adults joining in this new idea – they're not just not smoking at games, they are actually enthusiastic about doing the right thing by their children," Ms Butters says.

"Even one of our coaches, who loved a cigarette as he ran up and down the sideline during a game, put his hand up to go smokefree, and that is really something for him, especially when the game gets close!"

Henare Anderson says with smoking such a problem in Northland, the families of young rugby players are doing a really important thing by agreeing not to smoke at games.

"These are our future leaders, our future Black Ferns and All Blacks – we owe it to them to be the best role models we can," he said.

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