

Parade

Rodeo Cowboy Cody Kiser Joins Anti-Tobacco Fight

Lindsay Lowe, August 7 2014

The campaign to educate consumers about the dangers of tobacco has a new all-American hero: rodeo cowboy Cody Kiser, who's partnering with the Oral Cancer Foundation (OCF) to educate parents and kids about the health risks associated with smokeless tobacco.

While chewing tobacco has long been popular among rodeo cowboys, Kiser, 23, says the drug never appealed to him, and says he hopes to serve as a positive example in an industry with traditionally strong sponsorship ties to the tobacco industry.

"My dad was a cowboy, so I know what it's like looking up to cowboys as heroes for my whole life," he said in a release. "Health and fitness have always been incredibly important to my family. My dad was a positive role model in my life growing up in that regard, and the idea of using spit tobacco never appealed to me."

Tobacco and rodeo have a long intertwining history; the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association was sponsored by the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company from 1986 to 2009, when the Cowboys Association decided to end its relationship with tobacco advertisers.

One can of spit tobacco has the equivalent nicotine of 40 cigarettes, and a "30-minute chew" is the equivalent of smoking three cigarettes, according to the OCF, meaning that an addiction to smokeless tobacco "can be one of the hardest to break."

Spit tobacco (which can refer to smokeless tobacco, dip, snuff, chew, and chewing tobacco) can cause gum disease, tooth decay, and "white patches and oral lesion that can lead to oral cancer."

An alarming "15 percent of high school boys, and 9 percent of all high school students, are already using spit tobacco," the foundation says, while 3.5 percent of adults use the drug. An estimated 43,000 people will be diagnosed with some form of oral cancer in 2014, and the "fastest-growing segment" of that group are "young non-smokers," says the OCF.

Kiser says he hopes to serve as a role model for young people who idolize rodeo heroes and prevent them from becoming another oral cancer statistic.

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