

Latinos, tobacco use to be program focus

The Daniel Torres Hispanic Center will host a summit today at the Wyndham Reading on health risks linked to smoking.

By Phoebe Sweet

Reading Eagle

Most Americans no longer consider the Marlboro man as a robust symbol of good health.

But in some nations, the image still exists that smoking is a cool and mature thing to do.

"The unfortunate thing is that in Latin America smoking is actually going up, while in industrialized countries like America it's going down," said Jonathan D. Encarnacion, executive director of the Daniel Torres Hispanic Center.

Encarnacion said that's why it's important to educate Latinos, especially new immigrants and teenagers, about the health risks linked to tobacco use.

The Hispanic Center is hosting a Latino Tobacco Summit today at the Wyndham Reading, Fifth and Washington streets. The event, which is open to the public, is slated for 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Organizers are hoping for a strong turnout of teens and their parents.

"We want to increase awareness of the ills of tobacco and encourage students to live a healthier lifestyle that does not include tobacco use," said Abe Amoros, deputy press secretary for Gov. Ed Rendell and the keynote speaker for today's event. "We don't need to kowtow to negative marketing images out there. Smoking is not cool."

According to the American Lung Association, 16.7 percent of all Latinos and 20.5 percent of Latino high school students smoke. More than 9 percent of Latino middle school students smoke.

Ramon Rivera, smoking-cessation program coordinator for the Hispanic Center, said the summit is important because it brings resources and team anti-smoking groups together to educate parents and teenagers about the ills of tobacco use.

"We can give them prevention information," he said. "We can give them alternatives, activities, so they can do something and avoid starting to smoke."

Rivera said the program will teach teens how to resist peer pressure and show adults ways to cope with stress without turning to tobacco.

For more information on the Latino Tobacco Summit or the Hispanic Center's Tobacco Cessation Program, contact Rivera at 610-685-1296.