

FDA's new anti-smoking campaign uses hip-hop to target youth

October 6 2015, by Matthew Perrone



This image provided by the Food and Drug Administration shows an ad that is part of the agency's "Fresh Empire" campaign. The FDA on Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2015 said that it will spend \$128 million on the "Fresh Empire" campaign, which incorporates TV ads, events and local outreach to try and curb smoking among minority teenagers. (Food and Drug Administration via AP)

Government health officials are betting they can adapt the sounds, style and swagger of hip-hop culture to discourage young African Americans,

Hispanics and other minority youths from using tobacco.

The Food and Drug Administration said Tuesday that it will spend \$128 million on the "Fresh Empire" campaign, which incorporates advertisements, local events and outreach to try and curb smoking among minority teenagers.

FDA officials say research shows young people who identify with hip-hop are more likely to use cigarettes and other tobacco products than their peers.

To be sure, hip-hop's origins as an anti-establishment, urban movement seem to clash with the federal government's buttoned-down image. But FDA officials predict they can convincingly pitch their message to hip-hop fans, based on focus group testing.

"We know from our research that remaining in control is an important pillar of hip-hop culture. But smoking represents a loss of control, so tobacco use is actually in conflict with that priority," said Mitch Zeller, director of the FDA's Center for Tobacco Products.

Zeller, who oversaw the anti-tobacco "Truth" campaign while working at the nonprofit American Legacy Foundation in the early 2000s, said the hip-hop audience "is often hard to reach, has been underserved by tobacco education efforts and may be at higher risk for some of the most serious negative health outcomes."

No major recording artists are associated with the campaign, but FDA officials said they are working with "DJs, musicians and artists," at the local level who can influence young people.

One print ad for the campaign features a young black woman with dyed green hair seated at a large, mahogany desk with the caption: "CEO of

Independence." The same woman—identified by the FDA as California-based artist Jessica Williams—appears in a TV ad rapping about her grandfather's battle with lung cancer. The ad concludes with the tagline, "keep it fresh, live tobacco free."

Smoking almost always starts between ages 12 to 17, according to figures quoted by the FDA. Nearly 90 percent of adult smokers report they smoked their first cigarette by age 18, which is why anti-tobacco efforts often focus on reaching adolescents.

The new campaign will roll out next week in 36 markets throughout the U.S. and continue for at least 2 years. The ads will debut nationally during the BET Hip-Hop Awards, which are scheduled for Oct. 13.

"Fresh Empire" is the second in a series of FDA media campaigns designed to educate the public about the dangers of tobacco use.

Tobacco companies are footing the bill for the campaigns through fees charged by the FDA under a 2009 law that gave the agency authority over certain aspects of the tobacco industry. Among other powers, the law allows the FDA to restrict marketing of tobacco products to young people and gives the agency authority to evaluate the health risks of new tobacco products before they launch.

Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths in the U.S. each year, the leading preventable cause of death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

More information: freshempire.betobaccofree.hhs.gov/videos

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