

Tobacco-Free Schools

Tobacco use usually begins in early adolescence, and almost all first use occurs before young people graduate from high school. If adolescents decide to be tobacco-free, they will likely remain tobacco-free for the rest of their lives. Preventing young people from starting to use tobacco is critical to reducing the death and disease caused by tobacco use. An estimated 440,000 Americans die each year from diseases caused by smoking. Smoking costs the U.S. over \$150 billion each year in annual health care costs and lost productivity.

Young people develop a tolerance for, and become dependent on, nicotine the same way as adults do, and like adults, young people have a difficult time quitting.

If current tobacco use patterns persist in the U.S., an estimated 6.4 million children will die prematurely from a smoking-related disease.

Cigarette smoking during childhood and adolescence produces significant health problems among young people, including cough and phlegm production, an increased number of respiratory illnesses, decreased physical fitness and unfavorable lipid profile.

Policies to prevent tobacco use among young people should include:

Tobacco education in the schools

Restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotions

A complete ban on smoking by anyone on school grounds

No sale of tobacco products to minors

Tax increases on tobacco products so young people cannot afford them

Positive results have been seen in school-based programs that teach young people how to resist social influences to smoke. Programs to prevent tobacco use that are based on the same model have also demonstrated modest reductions in the initiation of smokeless tobacco use.

The effectiveness of school-based smoking prevention programs appears to be enhanced and sustained by comprehensive school health education and by community-wide programs that involve parents, mass media, community organizations, or other elements of an adolescent's social environment.

Smoking cessation programs for teenagers should be specifically designed to reach teens rather than adapted from an adult smoking cessation model.

Youth smoking cessation programs should focus on selecting appropriate facilitators who work well with teens in a non-judgmental manner.

Illegal sales of tobacco products are common. Active enforcement of age-at-sale policies by public officials and community members is necessary to prevent minor's access to tobacco.

Studies indicate that substantial increases in the real price of cigarettes significantly reduce cigarette smoking; young people are three times as responsive as adults to such price changes. Maintaining higher real prices of cigarettes depends on further tax increases to offset the effects of inflation.

Public smoking restrictions are an important component of the social environment that supports non-smoking behavior. Smoking restrictions reduce the number of opportunities to smoke, making smoking less convenient and less socially acceptable.

The net effects of smoking restrictions should reduce the psychosocial benefits of smoking to adolescents, making it less likely that those who experiment with smoking will continue to smoke and become dependent.

The following characteristics make model school smoking policies effective:

Smoking on school grounds, in school buildings, on school buses, and at school-sponsored events is prohibited for students, school personnel, and visitors.

Schools enforce the policy and consistently administer penalties for violations.

Disciplinary measures for non-compliance with policy are educational as well as punitive.

Policy development includes active collaboration with teachers, students, and parent groups to give direction and build support for tobacco-free schools.

All components of a school's smoking policy, including consequences for violations, are communicated in written and oral form to students, staff, and visitors.

District-wide educational programs addressing the prevention of tobacco use are initiated or expanded as part of the policy implementation process.

Smoking cessation programs or other incentives are developed for students, school personnel, and, if possible, the public. Programs are periodically evaluated to provide information on acceptance and effectiveness of policy.

Schools do not accept any contributions from the tobacco industry, including direct financial support and materials paid for or produced by or for the tobacco industry.