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**CONTACTS: Natalie Talis, 202-868-4813**

**Mina Radman, 202-296-5469**

**Alaska Kids to ‘Kick Butts’ on March 21**

***State Leaders Challenged to Create First Tobacco-Free Generation***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in Alaska will unite against tobacco use on March 21 as they join thousands of young people nationwide to mark Kick Butts Day. More than 1,000 events are planned across the United States for this annual day of youth activism, sponsored by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (See below for a list of local events.)

On Kick Butts Day, kids encourage their peers to be tobacco-free, reject tobacco companies’ devious marketing and urge elected officials to help make the next generation tobacco-free.

This year, Kick Butts Day is focusing attention on the progress the U.S. has made in reducing youth smoking and the actions needed to create the first tobacco-free generation. Since 2000, the national smoking rate among high school students has fallen by 71 percent (from 28 percent in 2000 to 8 percent in 2016). However, the fight against tobacco is far from over:

* Tobacco use is still the No. 1 cause of preventable death in the U.S., killing over 480,000 people and costing about $170 billion in health care expenses each year.
* Tobacco companies spend $8.9 billion a year – $1 million every hour – to market tobacco products in the U.S., often in ways that appeal to kids.
* Electronic cigarettes have become the most popular tobacco product used by kids – nationwide, 11.3 percent of high school students use e-cigarettes compared to 8 percent who smoke cigarettes. The latest trend with teens is JUUL, an e-cigarette that looks like a computer flash drive and comes in flavors like mango and fruit medley.

In Alaska, tobacco use claims 600 lives and costs $438 million in health care bills each year. Currently, 11.1 percent of Alaska’s high school students smoke.

On Kick Butts Day, kids and health advocates are calling on elected officials to implement proven strategies that make up a “roadmap to a tobacco-free generation.” These strategies include tobacco tax increases, comprehensive smoke-free laws, raising the tobacco sale age to 21, well-funded tobacco prevention programs and banning the sale of flavored tobacco products.

In Alaska, health advocates are pushing for a comprehensive, statewide smoke-free law to protect everyone’s right to breathe clean air.

“On Kick Butts Day, kids are celebrating the progress we’ve made to reduce tobacco use and building momentum to get us across the finish line,” said Matthew L. Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “Elected leaders in every state can help create the first tobacco-free generation by supporting proven strategies to prevent youth tobacco use.”

On Kick Butts Day, kids join in creative events ranging from classroom activities to educate their peers about the harmful ingredients in cigarettes to rallies at state capitols.

In Alaska, activities include:

Anti-tobacco advocates will staff a booth at **Juneau Douglas High School** during the annual **Juneau Lion’s Club** basketball tournament. They will share information about flavored tobacco products and play a “Kids in Jeopardy” tobacco trivia game. Time: 12:30 PM. Location: 1639 Glacier Avenue, Juneau. Contact: Kristin Cox (907) 723-6857.

Students at **Wasilla High School, Susitna Valley High School, Mat-Su Career & Tech High, Palmer High School** and **Burchell High School** willcreate and sign posters to encourage their peers to stay tobacco-free. The **Wasilla Museum** will display the posters in April. Time: 11:10 AM. Location: Wasilla High School, 701 E. Bogard Road, Wasilla. Contact: Noel Crowley-Bell (907) 775-6976.

Students at **Nenana City Public School** will pledge to be tobacco-free. Younger students will learn why they should say smoke-free, while older students will play a giant “smokes and ladders” game. Time: 12:10 PM. Location: 406 E. 2nd Street, Nenana. Contact: Mary Ellen Robinson (907) 347-8091.

Advocatesat the **University of Alaska Anchorage** will hand out anti-tobacco swag and educate students about the dangers of tobacco to promote a smoke-free lifestyle. Time: 10 AM. Location: 3211 Providence Drive, Anchorage. Contact: Valeria Delgado-Lopez (907) 903-5041.

On March 27,Students at **Petersburg High School** and **Petersburg Middle School** will create and sign a pledge banner to stay tobacco-free. Time: 11:30AM. Location: 109 Charles W. Street, Petersburg. Contact: Katie Yeckley (909) 520-4551.

All events will take place March 21 unless otherwise indicated. For a full list of Kick Butts Day activities in Alaska, visit [www.kickbuttsday.org/map](http://www.kickbuttsday.org/map). Additional information about tobacco, including state-by-state statistics, can be found at [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org).