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

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

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

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in Florida 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 Florida, tobacco use claims 32,300 lives and costs $8.64 billion in health care bills each year. Currently, 4.2 percent of Florida’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 Florida, health advocates are urging the Florida Constitution Revision Commission to reject a proposal (Proposal 94) that would divert funding from the state’s highly successful tobacco prevention program, called Tobacco Free Florida.

“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 Florida, activities include:

On March 20, students of **Suwannee and Lafayette County SWAT Clubs** in **Live Oak** will put on a “Rock the Town” scavenger hunt. To encourage the community to be tobacco-free, they will paint rocks with anti-tobacco messages and hide them around town for people to find. Time: 3–4:30 PM. Location: South Oaks Shopping Center, 1546 Ohio Avenue S., Live Oak. Contact: Heidi Hofer (386) 249-3986.

Students at **Pine Ridge High School** in **Deltona** will host a fear factor game to spread awareness about tobacco’s health effects. They will also put cups in their fence spelling out KICK BUTTS DAY to share their message with the community. Time: 11:15–11:45 AM. Location: Pine Ridge High School, 926 Howland Boulevard, Deltona. Contact: Renae Lee (386) 871-3056.

Students of **Orange County SWAT** in **Orlando** will come together to create a graffiti wall to educate the community about the dangers of tobacco. Time: 11 AM–2 PM. Location: Evans High School, 4949 Silver Star Road, Orlando. Contact: Dahlia Scafe (407) 867-0121.

On March 22, the **St. Lucie County Students Working Against Tobacco** will partner with the **St. Lucie Mets** baseball team to educate fans about the danger of tobacco through interactive activities at a booth at the stadium. Time: 4–7 PM. Location: First Data Field, 525 N.W. Peacock Boulevard, Port St. Lucie. Contact: Serena DeFrank (772) 618-5310.

On March 23, students from **Bonifay K-8 School** in **Bonifay** will hold their annual kick ball tournament where kids will learn about the importance of being tobacco-free. Time: 8:30 AM–2 PM. Location: 140 Blue Devil Drive, Bonifay. Contact: Christopher Lauen (850) 326-0831.

On March 23, the **Somerset Student Government SWAT Club** in **Monticello** will host a tobacco-free field day event. Along with relay races and games, students will air out tobacco’s dirty laundry with an informative t-shirt display and a quilt pledging to be tobacco-free. Time: 11 AM–3 PM. Location: Jefferson County K-12 Somerset School, 50 David Road, Monticello. Contact: Chastity McCarthy (850) 342-0170.

On March 23, **George Jenkins High School Students Working Against Tobacco** in **Polk County** will host a tobacco-free Olympics where students will present the effects of nicotine and teams will compete in Olympic-style games, including shortness of breath simulations. Time: 1:10–2 PM. Location: George Jenkins High School, 6000 Lakeland Highlands Road, Lakeland. Contact: Angela Pueschell (863) 205-8136.

All events will take place March 21 unless otherwise indicated. For a full list of Kick Butts Day activities in Florida, 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).