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

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in Georgia 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 Georgia, tobacco use claims 11,700 lives and costs $3.18 billion in health care bills each year. Currently, 12.8 percent of Georgia’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.

Health advocates are pushing for a comprehensive smoke-free law in Atlanta that can set an example for the state.

“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 Georgia, activities include:

Clayton County youth will meet at **South Clayton Recreation Center** to learn about the dangers of tobacco use before sending off balloons in honor of someone they know who actively uses tobacco or has passed away from its effects. Time: 6 PM. Location: 1837 McDonough Road, Hampton. Contact: Janée Morris (470) 631-4685.

In **Hinesville**, kids will meet at the **Historic Liberty County Courthouse** to learn more about the damaging effects of tobacco use and pledge to live a tobacco-free lifestyle. Time: 4 PM. Location: 100 Main Street, Hinesville. Contact: Gypsy Tart (912) 876-2133.

**HOSA-Future Health Professionals** members in **Cumming** will hold a one day stand next to Brusters at the Sharon Greens Shopping Center to teach their peers and community members about teen tobacco prevention and the harms of tobacco use. Their demonstration will simulate the effects of tobacco on long-term smokers, and free ice cream will be provided. Time: 6 PM. Location: 1540 Sharon Road, Cumming. Contact: Ritu Kapoor (404) 493-2646.

Select **Randolph-Clay Middle School** students will stay silent and wear a tear on their faces for Kick Butts Day to raise awareness about tobacco-related deaths in the community. Time: 10 AM. Location: 3451 GA Highway 266, Cuthbert. Contact: Chelsea Miliner (229) 310-2963.

Members of the **Health, Education, Awareness, and Research on Tobacco** (**HEART) Coalition** at **Carver High School** will display a poster showing household products that contain the same dangerous chemicals as cigarettes, such as ammonia and arsenic, and ask trivia questions about tobacco and cigarettes to educate their peers about their dangers. Time: 11 AM. Location: 55 McDonough Boulevard S.E., Atlanta. Contact: Nekatana Gilliam (770) 572-9406.

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