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

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in Louisiana 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 Louisiana, tobacco use claims 7,200 lives and costs $1.89 billion in health care bills each year. Currently, 12.1 percent of Louisiana’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.

“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 Louisiana, activities include:

Students from the **Louisiana School for Agricultural Sciences** in **Bunkie** will host a Kick Butts Day carnival, complete with booths to learn about the financial costs of smoking, the types of harmful chemicals in a cigarette, and the deceptive marketing practices of tobacco companies. They will also learn CPR techniques, speak with a representative from the Sheriff’s department, and tour an ambulance. Time: 12:30 PM. Location: 5303 Highway 115, Bunkie. Contact: Bonnie LeDuc (318) 729-2060.

All three campuses of **South Central Louisiana Technical College** will participate in a tombstone and body bag decorating contest, highlighting the dramatic toll of tobacco. All entries will be displayed in the Commons area, where winners will be announced and awarded a pizza party. Time: 12 PM. Location: 900 Youngs Road, Morgan City. Contact: Tammie Moore (337) 578-7830.

Students at **Alexandria Middle Magnet School** will learn about the negative impacts of tobacco during a morning assembly hosted by the school’s principal. The students will also sign a pledge to remain tobacco-free. Time: 8 AM. Location: 122 Maryland Avenue, Alexandria. Contact: Victory Lindo (318) 955-3000.

The **Rho Phi Chapter** of the **Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.**, in partnership with the **Omega Men Foundation**, will host its second annual Kick Butts Day Rally at the **Joseph A. Craig Charter School**. Students will create posters and perform skits promoting anti-tobacco themes. Time: 10 AM. Location: 1423 St. Philip Street, New Orleans. Contact: Marion Floyd (504) 952-4006.

In partnership with the **West Carroll Partners in Prevention,** student leaders from five **West Carroll Parish schools** will join the “Mighty Mess” morning show on KWCL-FM to explain why remaining tobacco-free is important, and promote a local ordinance to make it illegal to advertise tobacco products at children’s eye-level in local stores. Time: 8:05 AM. Location: 230 E. Main Street. Contact: Rhonda Posey (318) 282-0722.

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