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

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in Massachusetts 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 Massachusetts, tobacco use claims 9,300 lives and costs $4.08 billion in health care bills each year. Currently, 7.7 percent of Massachusetts’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 Massachusetts, health advocate are urging state lawmakers to pass a law increasing the statewide tobacco sale age to 21.

“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 Massachusetts, activities include:

Local youth from across the state will take a stand against tobacco at the **Massachusetts State House** in **Boston**. **The 84 Movement** will host an anti-tobacco rally where students will meet with their state representatives and senators to talk about the dangers of smoking. The **Massachusetts Department of Public Health** will host an awards ceremony for health leaders, public officials, and the press to recognize youth and adult leaders in the fight against the tobacco industry. Time: 8:30 AM. Location: 24 Beacon Street, Boston. Contact: Joan Rubel (413) 884-4804.

**Westhampton Elementary School** sixth graders are creating an anti-e-cigarette and vaping video which will be aired in all **Hampshire Regional Middle and High School** classrooms. Location: 19 Stage Road, Westhampton. Contact: Amy Avakian (413) 210-2056.

Students from **Somerville Positive Forces** youth groups, in partnership with **Somerville Cares About Prevention** and the **City of Somerville Health and Human Services Department**, will chalk messages on the sidewalks around **City Hall** and in front of **Somerville High School** to raise awareness about the harms of tobacco use and promote the 1-800-Quit-Now hotline. Time: 1 PM. Location: 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville. Contact: Lovelee Heller (617) 625-6600 ext. 4322.

In an effort to implement a smoke-free campus in **Amherst**, students from **Tobacco-Free UMass** will organize a cigarette butt cleanup on the grounds of the **University of Massachusetts Amherst,** beginning at the **University Health Service** building. Time: 11 AM. Location: 150 Infirmary Way, Amherst. Contact: Taylor McAndrew (413) 658-5770.

In partnership with the **Arlington Youth Health and Safety Coalition**, students will commit to be tobacco-free and to encourage peers and loved ones to quit smoking by constructing and signing a pledge wall at **Arlington High School**. Time: 11:15 AM. Location: 869 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington. Contact: Anna Collins (978) 835-0010.

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