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**New Jersey Kids to ‘Kick Butts’ on March 21**

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in New Jersey 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 New Jersey, tobacco use claims 11,800 lives and costs $4.06 billion in health care bills each year. Currently, 8.2 percent of New Jersey’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 New Jersey, activities include:

Students at **Kittatinny Regional High School** in **Newton** will commit to be tobacco-free and encourage peers and loved ones to quit smoking by constructing and signing a pledge wall. Time: 10:35 AM. Location: 77 Halsey Road, Newton. Contact: Victoria Recenello (973) 479-5680.

Students at **Warren Hills Regional High School** in **Washington** will highlight the impact of tobacco and tobacco marketing with public messages about the dangers of e-cigarettes and vaping. Students will pledge to be tobacco-free. Time: 10:40 AM. Location: 41 Jackson Valley Road, Washington. Contact: Liz Montalvo (973) 262-0896.

Local youth of **Washington** will organize an anti-tobacco rally at **Gibsons Fitness Center** to teach the public about the dangers of smoking. Time: 11 AM. Location: 75 E. Washington Avenue, Washington. Contact: Kevin Hopkins (908) 689-9733.

Students at **Absegami High School** in **Galloway** will illustrate the deadly effects of tobacco use with an exhibit featuring 32 tombstones to represent the number of adults in New Jersey who die each day from smoking related illnesses. Time: 12 PM. Location: 201 S. Wrangleboro Road, Galloway. Contact: Kelly Wischner (908) 256-4169.

Students at **William Paterson University** in **Wayne** will empower teachers, students, public health advocates, and other community members to stand out and speak up against big tobacco. Students will host an anti-tobacco rally open to the public to highlight the dangers of smoking and pledge support for a tobacco-free campus. Time: 12 PM. Location: Machuga Student Center, 300 Pompton Road, Wayne. Contact: Aleksandar Kecojevic (443) 858-6209.

On March 22, local youth of **Paterson** are taking a stand against tobacco. **The Municipal Alliance for Prevention Program** will host an anti-tobacco rally open to the public where they can learn of the dangers of smoking. Time: 6 PM. Location: 60 Temple Street, Paterson. Contact: Carrie Bergeson (336) 624-3985.

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