**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 16, 2018**

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

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

**Rhode Island Kids to ‘Kick Butts’ on March 21**

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

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island, tobacco use claims 1,800 lives and costs $640 million in health care bills each year. Currently, 4.8 percent of Rhode Island’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 Rhode Island, activities include:

Students at **Wickford Middle School** in **North Kingstown**are kicking tobacco in the butt by displaying and encouraging peers to sign a #BeTheFirst Pledge Wall. They will also view a slideshow during lunch with facts and information about the negative effects of smoking. Time: 11:25 AM. Location: 250 Tower Hill Road, North Kingstown. Contact: Stephanie McGehearty (508) 783-4366.

**Varsity Athletes Above Substance Abuse (VAASA)** will educate students at **Narragansett Pier Middle School** about the dangers of tobacco use. The students will play a digital game, called Kahoots, about the effects of vaping, using their laptops and phones to engage and learn. Time: 10:30 AM. Location: [235 South Pier Road, Narragansett](https://maps.google.com/?q=235+South+Pier+Road,+Narragansett&entry=gmail&source=g). Contact: Nancy DeNuccio [(410) 787-8474](tel:(410)%20787-8474).

High school students from **Beacon Charter High School for the Arts**, **Central Falls High School**, **West Warwick High School**, and others will gather at the Round Top Center before setting off on a zombie walk through downtown **Providence** to raise public awareness about tobacco’s damaging effects. The walk will end at the state house where teens will deliver a message to decision-makers and the public during a rally-style press conference. Time: 5:30 PM. Location: 82 Smith Street, Providence. Benvinda Santos (401) 222-7637.

Students at **Mt. Hope High School** in **Bristol** are organizing and hosting a full day of activities to promote living a tobacco-free life. **Students Taking Action Against Negative Decisions (STAAND)** will dress as zombies and place body bags throughout the school to represent the dangers of smoking. Time: 8 AM. Location: [199 Chestnut Street, Bristol](https://maps.google.com/?q=199+Chestnut+Street,+Bristol&entry=gmail&source=g). Contact: Barbara Palumbo (401) 339-5194.

On March 29, **The HOPE (Helping Others Protect Each Other)** clubwill host a fun-filled day of anti-tobacco activities at **Barrington High School**. The HOPE club will show videos throughout the day about the dangerous effects of smoking and vaping, while students will decorate the school with informational posters about the dangers of smoking, and participate in a raffle to answer questions correctly about the harmful impacts of tobacco and nicotine. Time: 7:40 AM. Location: [220 Lincoln Avenue, Barrington](https://maps.google.com/?q=220+Lincoln+Avenue,+Barrington&entry=gmail&source=g). Contact: Joanne Royley [(401) 935-3512](tel:(401)%20935-3512).

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