

## Preventing Tobacco Product Use in Schools

# How Can You Help?

Nearly all tobacco product use begins in adolescence, and any tobacco product use among youth is unsafe. Youth nicotine use can lead to addiction and can harm the developing brain, impacting learning, memory, and attention.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, more than 1 in 4 high school students and about 1 in 14 middle school students had used a tobacco product in the past 30 days.<sup>2</sup> This was a considerable increase from 2017, which was driven by an increase in electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use. Some e-cigarettes resemble ordinary objects found in a classroom such as USB flash drives or highlighters. E-cigarettes can also be used to deliver marijuana and other drugs. E-cigarettes are sometimes called “e-cigs,” “vapes,” “JUUL,” “e-hookahs,” “vape pens,” and “electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS).”

Students have reported seeing classmates using e-cigarettes on school grounds.<sup>3</sup> This can expose students who do not use e-cigarettes to secondhand e-cigarette aerosol, which can contain harmful substances, including nicotine and cancer-causing chemicals.<sup>1</sup> In addition, e-cigarettes can cause unintended injuries, such as explosions from defective batteries and poisonings from swallowing, breathing, or absorbing e-cigarette liquid through their skin or eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Schools are critical environments for establishing tobacco-free social norms and educating youth about the harms of tobacco product use. The tobacco industry, including e-cigarette makers, may offer tobacco prevention resources or curricula to your school or district. According to the 2012 Surgeon General’s Report on Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults, tobacco industry-sponsored school-based tobacco prevention programs are ineffective and may promote tobacco use among youth.<sup>4</sup> As such, school-based efforts to prevent youth tobacco use are encouraged to remain independent of industry sponsorship.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, since the tobacco industry has been found to target youth with its marketing tactics, and because youth are vulnerable to nicotine addiction that may require treatment, it is important to consider alternatives to discipline rather than purely punitive measures for students caught using tobacco products.<sup>6</sup>





## What's Happening at School?

Knowing the answers to the following questions can help you support prevention of tobacco product use, including e-cigarettes, at your child's school. If you don't know the answers to these questions, check out the school handbook or school website, attend a school wellness meeting or Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting, or simply ask your child's teacher.

1. Does the school have a tobacco-free campus policy that prohibits the use of any tobacco product, including e-cigarettes, on school grounds and at school-sponsored events, by everyone, at all times, and prohibits students' possession of any tobacco product at school? If so, how is the tobacco-free campus policy enforced?
2. Does the school provide evidence-based, age-appropriate tobacco prevention curricula that is not sponsored by the tobacco industry?
3. How does the school train teachers to identify tobacco product use, including e-cigarettes, on campus?
4. How does the school educate parents and caregivers about tobacco products, including e-cigarettes?
5. When a student has violated the tobacco-free campus policy, does the school take **reasonable steps** to address the behavior? For example, are steps first taken to engage parents to address the behavior, and resources offered to help students quit?
6. Are procedures in place for the safe handling and disposal of confiscated tobacco products?



## Ideas for Parents

You can be involved in your child's school by **attending** meetings, workshops, or training events offered by the school; **communicating** with school staff and other parents; **volunteering** for school events or in your child's classroom; **reinforcing** tobacco prevention messages and practices your child learns at school; **helping** make decisions about health in the school; and **being part** of community activities supported by the school. Here are some specific ideas for how you can support your child's school in addressing tobacco product use:

- Advocate for a tobacco-free campus policy if your school doesn't have one in place, and ensure that it is enforced. **Sample policies** are available to serve as a starting place.
- Work with your child's school to incorporate evidence-based, non-tobacco or e-cigarette industry funded, tobacco prevention curricula that emphasizes e-cigarettes, such as that offered by **Stanford University** or the **University of Texas**.
- Put tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, on the agenda of your next Parent-Teacher Association meeting. Take a look at the **National PTA's Resolution on E-cigarettes**.
- Work with your child's school to develop educational materials, such as a letter to parents or training session for teachers, about the different types of e-cigarettes and risks to youth posed by the products. Use existing, **science-based resources** as a starting place.
- Examine the tobacco product retailers within walking distance of your child's school. Report potential violations of restrictions on underage sales of tobacco products to the Food and Drug Administration **online** or by calling 1-800-287-1373, or contact your state Attorney General's office or public health department.
- Learn about efforts in your community and state to prevent access to and use of tobacco products by youth, including protecting the public from exposure to secondhand smoke or secondhand e-cigarette aerosol, increasing the price of tobacco products, or increasing the age of sale for tobacco products to age 21. For information, contact your state or local health department.



Check out additional resources for parents related to the school nutrition environment and services, physical education and physical activity, and managing chronic health conditions at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/P4HS.htm>.

## REFERENCES

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