

Communication Tips: Get the Word Out About Your Tobacco-free Schools Policy

IT'S ABOUT HEALTH!

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in our nation.¹

Smoking kills more Americans than alcohol, drug use, car crashes, firearms, toxic and microbial agents, and sexual behaviors combined!²

Smokeless tobacco contains 28 cancer causing agents (carcinogens) and increases the risk of developing oral cancer.³

Adolescents who smoke are more likely to engage in risky sexual and alcohol-related behaviors and struggle academically.^{4,5}

Citations: Page 21.

A carefully considered tobacco-free schools policy is the foundation of a comprehensive approach to tobacco prevention in schools. Policy is the mechanism that allows consistent no-use standards and enforcement procedures to be passed from one Superintendent to the next at the district level and from one principal to the next at the school level. People and programs may come and go but a policy lasts and can provide guidance to new leaders.

Development of the written policy is an important first step but what is key to successful implementation is the communication and enforcement of the policy. Students, staff, parents and the community need to know the provisions of the policy, why the policy is important and why it is important for the school setting to be tobacco-free.

Policy Rationale: Why Should Schools Be Tobacco-free?

It's about promoting good health

The main purpose of a tobacco-free schools policy is to promote good health among students, staff, parents and the community. A tobacco-free schools policy supports safe schools, promotes clean indoor air, and creates an environment where students are encouraged to make healthy choices that will prevent future nicotine addiction and tobacco-related illnesses. Policy helps change social norms as consistent no-use messages are communicated, modeled and enforced in the school setting.

A tobacco-free schools policy is not meant to target adult tobacco users outside the school setting or to question the legality of adult tobacco use. The policy does, however, make clear that tobacco use on school grounds or at school functions sends the wrong message to students and is prohibited at all times.

It's the Law

Colorado passed a law in 1994 mandating that all schools be tobacco-free. A second law was passed in 2008 prohibiting youth possession of tobacco anywhere, including school grounds. The two laws together send a powerful message in the state of Colorado about youth and tobacco.

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General Strategies for Reaching Students, Staff, Parents, and Community

- Post prominently placed tobacco-free school signs on school grounds.
 - School building entrances
 - Parking lots
 - Athletic fields and indoor facilities
 - Buses
 - School vehicles
 - Entrance to school grounds
 - Gathering places like restrooms, loading areas and stairwells
- Post an announcement about the policy on district and school web pages, including the athletic schedule page.
- Include a statement that the school district is tobacco-free in contracts with vendors who will work on school or district grounds and groups that are using school facilities.
- Announce the policy at all athletic events, meetings, concerts and plays.
- Print reminders about no tobacco use in event bulletins.
- Remove all ashtrays on and around school property, especially those outside the entrances to school buildings.
- Ask students, staff and community volunteers to assist in distributing informational flyers regarding the policy at school events, particularly at off-site sporting events or other events when tobacco use may be an issue.
- Make sure messages are tobacco-free vs. smoke-free to include chew tobacco and other tobacco-derived products.
- Provide easily accessible information on the Colorado QuitLine (1-800-QUIT-NOW) to help those who are ready to quit.

TARGET GROUPS

There are basic communication strategies that can be used in many different settings. We encourage you to use these tips as starting points and come up with new ideas or find ways to personalize these approaches for your district or school.



Free signage
is available from
www.cohealthresources.org

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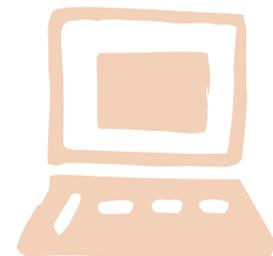
COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Communicating policy effectively to students, parents, staff and the community will make enforcement easier. It can help prevent negative confrontations with parents, workers and visitors as clear, positive and consistent messages are sent on an on-going basis.

The information provided here gives a variety of options and ideas for communicating about policy and health. There are a wealth of other opportunities to get the message out in effective ways—all it takes is creativity and a commitment to communication.

Communicating to Parents/Guardians

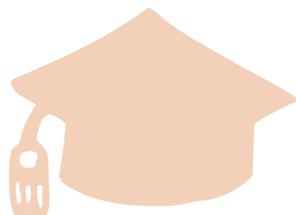
- Send a letter to each parent or guardian that:
 - 1) explains the policy;
 - 2) provides the health, academic and social reasons for the policy;
 - 3) outlines the consequences for violators; and
 - 4) asks for support in enforcement.
- Ask parents to sign student-school contracts that address the tobacco policy for participation in sports, extra and co-curricular activities.
- Discuss the policy at PTA, PTO or similar meetings.
- Include an article outlining the policy and implications of the policy in PTO/PTA newsletters and school or community newspapers.
- Send a letter home or call parents if a student violates the policy.



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Communicating to Students

- Put the policy in student handbooks and orientation materials.
- Verbally review the policy at orientation meetings especially with new or transfer students.
- Make announcements over morning broadcasts. Use “Channel One” to create recorded messages and “Did You Know?” announcements.
- Spread policy information through student organizations, activities and newspapers.
- Have students design posters, banners and signs to communicate the policy and promote a tobacco-free environment.
- Provide information about how students can access cessation programs and on-line resources such as:
 - mylastdip.com
- Involve or create student groups to advocate for a tobacco-free environment.
- Spread information on tobacco prevention and cessation resources at school health fairs or booths related to tobacco-themed events such as the Great American Smoke Out or National Kick Butts Day.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“Communication Tips” information was adapted from School Tobacco Policies, Oregon Department of Health and Human Services, 2002 and the Tobacco-free Schools Toolkit by the North Carolina Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch at www.nctobaccofreeschools.org

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CITATIONS

¹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Preventing Tobacco Use Fact Sheet. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; Revised 2008.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Annual Smoking–Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Productivity Losses—United States, 1997–2001. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report [serial online]. 2005; 54(25) 625-628 [accessed 2006 Sep 23].

³National Cancer Institute. Smokeless Tobacco or Health: An International Perspective. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute; 1992 [accessed 2006 Dec].

⁴Durant, RH, et al. “The Relationship Between Early Age of Onset of Initial Substance Use and Engaging in Multiple Health Risk Behaviors Among Young Adolescents,” Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine, 1999 March; 153(3): 286-91 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services CDC, 2008)

⁵Camenga, Deepa et al., “The Changing Risk Profile of the American Adolescent Smoker: Implications for Prevention Programs and Tobacco Intervention,” Journal of Adolescent Health, Vol., 39, No. 1 July 2006.

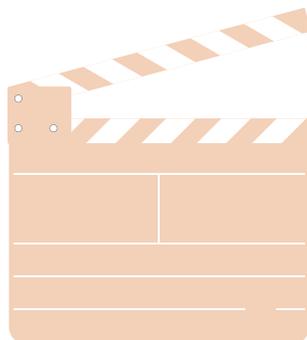
Communicating to Employees

- Include a statement that the school district is tobacco-free on all job applications and inform potential employees of the district’s policy at all job interviews.
- Provide every school district employee a copy of the policy and a letter of explanation from the school board.
- Hold in-service training on tobacco-related and other school health policies for all staff including teaching staff, bus drivers, aides, food service workers and maintenance staff. Make sure coaches or others that may work with the school on a limited basis also get the information.
- Discuss tobacco and health policies at staff meetings and new staff orientation.
- Post information, along with a copy of the policy, in staff lounges or offices.
- Include information in staff newsletters.
- Provide information on how staff can access cessation resources
- Involve respected and well-liked school personnel in sharing messages with staff groups.
- Use the internal staff website; worksite wellness committee meetings and insurance benefit meetings to communicate the tobacco-free schools policy.
- Remind employees, faculty, and staff that they are all role models and are part of creating a healthy, tobacco-free learning environment.

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Sample Theater or Sports Event Announcements

- For the health and safety of our students, _____(name of school district), is proud to be tobacco-free. At this time we would like to remind our home fans and visitors that the use of any tobacco products by students or adults during tonight's game is strictly prohibited. We appreciate your support and would like to thank you for keeping our school and stadium tobacco-free. Enjoy the game!
- We would like to remind our visitors and fans that smoking or chewing tobacco is prohibited on school grounds—including in and around the stadium. Thank you for your support and enjoy the game!
- Thank you for attending tonight's performance. We would like to remind our audience that (name of school/district) _____ is tobacco-free. Tobacco use of any kind is prohibited in and around the theater. Thank you for your cooperation.
- Thank you for keeping our school tobacco-free. We would like to remind everyone that tobacco use of any kind is not permitted on school grounds.
- To promote the health and safety of our students and community, we ask that you please not use tobacco of any kind while on school grounds. Thank you for your cooperation.
- Did you know in Colorado 4300 adult smokers die each year from smoking and another 740 non-smoking adults die from exposure to secondhand smoke? For the health and safety of our students and community please refrain from tobacco use while on school grounds. (Source: Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids)
- Did you know that the nicotine found in tobacco products is highly addictive and that most smokers would like to quit? For more information on how to quit smoking or chewing tobacco contact the Colorado QuitLine at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.



CUSTOMIZE

These are just a few sample announcements that can be printed in programs or said over the loudspeaker. Use these samples as starting points and change them to make them fit for your school or community!