



How to Help Your School Go Tobacco Free: A Parent's Guide

Most school campuses are smokefree when you are indoors but there are still schools – including elementary, middle and high schools – that allow smoking outdoors on school grounds. Studies have shown that tobacco-free spaces are a proven way to encourage our kids to never start smoking.¹ By working with your school, you can help ensure that students, faculty and visitors are protected from secondhand smoke and help our next generation be tobacco free.

Step 1 – Contact Your School Administration

Email or call your school principal or school administration to set-up a meeting to discuss why your school should go completely tobacco free – indoors and outside. Feel free to use our template email to help start the conversation.

Dear Principal [LastName],

Our children spend nearly 1,000 hours on our school's campus between class time, and before and after school activities. I'd like to work with the school so that in addition to a healthy learning environment, we can improve our student's air – including outdoor spaces.

Would you have time to meet to talk about how our school can go completely tobacco free, and set a healthy precedent in our children's lives? Tobacco-free spaces are a proven way to encourage our kids to never start smoking. By not allowing staff, students or visitors to bring tobacco-related products on campus at any time, our school will take the lead in fostering a tobacco-free generation.

The American Lung Association has a [number of resources available](#) to help us go tobacco free, including a template Tobacco-Free School Campus Policy, smokefree signage and posters, as well as template communication pieces for parents, teachers and students. Let me know when you have time this month to talk through how we can help implement this updated tobacco-free policy for our school.

Thank you so much for your time, and I look forward to discussing with you further,

[Your Name]

[Email Address] | [Phone Number]

Step 2 – Get the Support of the PTA

Reserve time on your PTA's next meeting agenda to enlist support for a tobacco-free campus from other parents, and encourage them to reach out to the school principal as well. The more supportive voices from parents, the more likely you'll gain approval from the administration!

Step 3 – Be Prepared

Come armed with facts and figures to your PTA or school administration meeting, and make sure to bring the [free school templates](#), [template Tobacco-Free School Campus Policy](#) and [quit smoking resources](#), and let them know you are able to help support and implement the policy.

1. Nicotine addiction can start early during adolescents. More than 8 out of 10 cigarette smokers first tried smoking by age 18, and 94% tried smoking by age 21.²
2. While the rate of cigarette smokers has declined among high school students, the increased use of electronic cigarettes containing nicotine has negated any progress.³
3. Half of middle and high school students who used tobacco products in 2015 were current users of two or more tobacco products.
4. Hookah smoking is most common in the United States among young adults ages 18 to 24;⁴ however, some studies suggest significant use among middle and high school students.⁴ Hookah smoking may serve as a bridge to other forms of tobacco use and is falsely perceived as less harmful than cigarette smoking.⁵
5. In a recent national survey of 12th graders, 17 percent reported smoking a hookah within the past year.⁴
6. 480,000 lives are lost to tobacco each year, including over 41,000 due to secondhand smoke.⁶
7. If smoking continues at the current rate among U.S. youth, 5.6 million of today's Americans younger than 18 years of age are expected to die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.⁵
8. Nicotine use during adolescence and young adulthood has been associated with lasting cognitive and behavioral impairments, including effects on working memory and attention.⁵
9. An estimated 58 million nonsmoking Americans, including 41% of children aged 3-11 years, are exposed to secondhand smoke.⁷

Step 4 – Share Your Smokefree Status

Let us know when your school goes completely tobacco free! Send the American Lung Association an email at Info@Lung.org or post a photo of your smokefree school sign with #BeTheFirst.

Thank you for all of your dedication to helping the next generation go tobacco free!



¹ Gilpin, E.A.; Emery, S.L.; Farkas, A.J.; Distefan, J.M.; White, M.M.; Pierce, J.P., "The California Tobacco Control Program: a decade of progress, results from the California Tobacco Survey, 1990-1999 - final report," Sacramento: California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section (TCS) La Jolla: University of California, San Diego, December 26, 2001.

² Substance Abuse And Mental Health Services Administration. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. Analysis by the American Lung Association Epidemiology and Statistics Unit Using SPSS Software.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General. 2016.

⁴ Barnett et al. Waterpipe tobacco smoking among middle and high school students. *Am J Pub Hlth.* 2009; 15:1225.

⁵ Maziak, W. The global epidemic of waterpipe smoking. *Addictive Behavior.* 2011; 36:1-5.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/50th-anniversary/index.htm>. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vital Signs: Disparities in Nonsmokers' Exposure to Secondhand Smoke - United States, 1999-2012. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, February 3, 2015.