

Recommendations for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use and Addiction

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of illness and death in the United States. Indiana has the 10th highest smoking rate in the country and each day **27 Hoosier children become daily smokers**. School programs, as a part of a comprehensive tobacco control effort, have been effective in reducing tobacco use among youth. An important component of an effective school programs is the enforcement of a tobacco- free policy on school campuses.

The following recommendations are from the **Guidelines for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use and Addiction**, MMWR February 25, 1994 / Vol. 43 / No. RR-2ⁱ

The seven recommendations below summarize strategies that are effective in preventing tobacco use among youth. To ensure the greatest impact, schools should implement all seven recommendations.

- 1. Develop and enforce a school policy on tobacco use.***
2. Provide instruction about the short- and long-term negative physiologic and social consequences of tobacco use, social influences on tobacco use, peer norms regarding tobacco use, and refusal skills.
3. Provide tobacco-use prevention education in kindergarten through 12th grade; this instruction should be especially intensive in junior high or middle school and should be reinforced in high school.
4. Provide program-specific training for teachers.
5. Involve parents or families in support of school-based programs to prevent tobacco use.
6. Support cessation efforts among students and all school staff who use tobacco.
7. Assess the tobacco-use prevention program at regular intervals.

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Recommendation 1: Develop and enforce a school policy on tobacco use.

A school policy on tobacco use must be consistent with state and local laws and should include the following elementsⁱⁱ:

- An explanation of the rationale for preventing tobacco use (i.e., tobacco is the leading cause of death, disease, and disability)
- Prohibitions against tobacco use by students, all school staff, parents, and visitors on school property, in school vehicles, and at school-sponsored functions away from school property
- Prohibitions against tobacco advertising in school buildings, at school functions, and in school publications
- A requirement that all students receive instruction on avoiding tobacco use
- Provisions for students and all school staff to have access to programs to help them quit using tobacco
- Procedures for communicating the policy to students, all school staff, parents or families, visitors, and the community
- Provisions for enforcing the policy

To ensure broad support for school policies on tobacco use, representatives of relevant groups, such as students, parents, school staff and their unions, and school board members, should participate in developing and implementing the policy. Examples of policies have been published, and additional samples can be obtained from state and local boards of education.

Clearly articulated school policies, applied fairly and consistently, can help students decide not to use tobaccoⁱⁱⁱ. Policies that prohibit tobacco use on school property, require prevention education, and provide access to cessation programs rather than solely instituting punitive measures are most effective in reducing tobacco use among students^{iv}.

A tobacco-free school environment can provide health, social, and economic benefits for students, staff, the school, and the district. These benefits include decreased fires and discipline problems related to student smoking, improved compliance with local and state smoking ordinances, and easier upkeep and maintenance of school facilities and grounds.

ⁱ The MMWR series of publications is published by the Epidemiology Program Office, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Atlanta, Georgia 30333.

ⁱⁱ National School Boards Association. No smoking: a board member's guide to nonsmoking policies for schools. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association, 1987.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grimes JD, Swisher JD. Educational factors influencing adolescent decision-making regarding use of alcohol and drugs. J Alcohol Drug Educ 1989; 35: 1-15.

^{iv} Pentz MA, Brannon BR, Carlin VL, Barrett EJ, MacKinnon DP, Flay BR. The power of policy: the relationship of smoking policy to adolescent smoking. Am J Public Health 1989; 79: 857-62.

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