

Schools

Why

Smokefree policies are essential in schools and on school grounds because children are among those who suffer the most severe consequences from environmental tobacco smoke (along with people who have health problems and older people). In addition, schools have a greater responsibility to provide a healthful environment because of their role as protectors of students. Federal legislation (the Pro Children's Act) bans smoking in all public schools, private schools that get federal funds, and other federally funded children's programs. Many states and local governments mandate smokefree schools and school premises.

States that mandate smokefree school buildings and grounds include Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. States that have laws requiring smokefree school buildings include Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Utah.

Because students are still in their formative years, it is particularly important for educational institutions to reinforce health messages through example. If children are taught that smoking is dangerous, then the school should not

allow smoking. If adults are allowed to smoke, that sends a message that smoking is a grown-up thing to do and makes smoking more attractive to children.

Any school policy that deters or postpones children's tobacco use contributes greatly to their health. Studies confirm that the earlier a person starts smoking, the more devastating the health consequences.

Colleges and universities are also accepting their responsibility to model smokefree messages. Hundreds of institutions of higher learning have established smokefree policies. In Georgia, for example, many of the state's 34 colleges and universities are smokefree indoors. North Georgia College became the first university in the state to ban all forms of tobacco use on its campus, indoors and outdoors, March 1, 1994. In the words of President Delmas J. Allen, "We have to set an example and practice what we preach."

An important but often overlooked reason for eliminating smoking in schools is to prevent fires, which can be particularly catastrophic where children are present.

How

The board of education or school directors should make it clear that the



SMOKEFREE AIR
Everywhere

purpose of a smokefree policy, besides protecting health and safety, is to reinforce the school's educational message that smoking is harmful. The board is not pressuring teachers into being role models, but is fulfilling its responsibility to set curriculum and teaching messages.

In residential schools, where everyone shares the same ventilation system, it is essential to eliminate smoking in order to protect nonsmoking students and staff from the discomfort and health consequences of tobacco smoke. Prevention of fires is another reason residences should be smokefree.

There should be no areas at schools, including outdoors, where smoking is permitted. Public health recommendations regarding addictive substances vary for different drugs. The recommendations for alcohol use are that, if people drink, they should wait until adulthood, drink in moderation, and behave responsibly about drinking and driving. In the case of cigarettes, the health recommendation is not to smoke at all because, even in small amounts, tobacco smoke is hazardous to the health of smokers and nonsmokers. Given those recommendations, offering cocktail lounges to teachers might be less inappropriate than smoking areas.

Keeping bathrooms smokefree is important for the health and comfort of the majority of students who do not smoke; they need access to toilet facilities. This is not just a matter of comfort. For asthmatic children, ETS exposure can be life-threatening. And asthma is on the rise among children. Maintaining smokefree bathrooms also helps to reduce smoking by students. Some schools, in an effort to avoid requiring teachers to be monitors of

smoking, have equipped bathrooms with highly sensitive smoke alarms, wired to a signal in an administrator's office.

Some schools have required students caught smoking to take a stop-smoking course. Students "sentenced" to a cessation program have been resistant and program facilitators have objected. But other schools have discovered that some students "get caught" smoking because they want help to end their smoking addiction but do not want to admit that to friends. Eighty percent of children who smoke want to quit but only 1.2 percent succeed, according to a nationwide report released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in February 1995.

Adult cessation programs are not designed for children. Cessation programs addressing the emotional issues and smoking behaviors of young smokers have been developed by the American Lung Association and other organizations.

Schools should not allow the sale of cigarettes on school property. Even colleges and training schools with adult students frequently have minors present. Allowing cigarette sales encourages violations of laws prohibiting sales to minors and laws prohibiting purchase and use of tobacco by minors.

(Please see the Public Places and Outdoors sections for more information.)