

Letter to Parents

In class today, your child participated in Tar Wars, a tobacco-free education program from the American Academy of Family Physicians. Tar Wars is designed for fourth- and fifth-grade students and is presented by volunteer health care professionals and educators. The program consists of two components: a one-hour classroom presentation and a follow-up poster or video contest.

Did you know?

Approximately 90 percent of all tobacco users started at or before the age of 18. One-fifth of our children are current smokers by the time they leave high school. Children are twice as likely as adults to recall tobacco advertising. More than five million children alive today will die prematurely from smoking-related illnesses.

Research from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that the smoking rate is three times higher for children that live with a parent that smokes. In addition, using smokeless tobacco increases the risk of oral cancer three to ten times.

How Can Parents Protect Their Children From Smoking?

Be tobacco-free role models. Maintain a smoke-free home and car. Don't start smoking. If you do, then we strongly urge you to quit. Take an active interest in your child's social life. Be aware of who your child hangs out with and if they smoke.

To remain tobacco-free, your child will need a clear, no-use message, factual information, and a strong will to resist peer pressure. Teach your children to be aware of how tobacco and other drugs are promoted in the media, through music, movies and television and other communication vehicles. Continue to practice with your child how to say "no" and refuse tobacco. Your children will appreciate the interest you show in their health and well-being.

Take the Tobacco-Free Pledge

Children take promises very seriously. Ask your child to commit to being tobacco-free by entering into a contract with them. Consider using an incentive (ie, money, a special trip) to reward them for staying tobacco free.

Facts About Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals and at least 50 of those are known to cause cancer. Babies and children who breathe secondhand smoke suffer from increased incidences of: Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), childhood asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, wheezing, coughing spells, ear infections and frequent, and severe asthma attacks.

How Can Parents Protect Their Children From Secondhand Smoke?

- Don't allow smoking anywhere in the home or car.
- Don't smoke while holding a child or when near a child.
- Insist on being seated in the non-smoking section of restaurants and other public places.
- Don't allow caregivers to smoke around your children or in your home.
- Visit the American Academy of Pediatrics Richmond Center (<http://aap.org/richmondcenter/>). This site was developed to provide the information and tools needed to help protect children from the harmful effects of tobacco and secondhand smoke.

If You Smoke or Know Someone Who Does

Are you thinking about quitting smoking or know someone who is? Call the National Network of Quitlines at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669) to receive **FREE** information and help. For additional tobacco prevention and cessation resources, go to:

- www.askandact.org
- www.familydoctor.org (click on "quitting smoking" under healthy living)
- www.smokefree.gov
- www.ffsonline.org (American Lung Association's Freedom from Smoking program)
- www.tobaccofreekids.org

Media

Children are influenced by what they see in the media (television, movies, games, sporting events, etc.), therefore it is important to take the opportunity when you see smoking or tobacco advertising to talk with your child about the reality and dangers of using any type of tobacco products.

For more information about Tar Wars, go to www.tarwars.org. To contact Tar Wars staff, please call 800-TAR-WARS or send an e-mail to tarwars@aafp.org. *Tar Wars is supported in part by a grant from the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.*