

## A Dozen Good Reasons *Why?* Tobacco-Free Schools

Modified by Lynn Ann Duffley, Canadian Cancer Society, from *Creating and Maintaining a Tobacco-Free School Policy*, a resource by the Partnership For A Tobacco-Free Maine and available on-line at [www.tobaccofreemaine.org](http://www.tobaccofreemaine.org)

### 1. Tobacco kills and disables.

Schools are responsible for protecting children in their charge from dangerous products. Tobacco use adversely affects nearly every system and function of the human body and is the only product that, when used as intended, it will disable and/or kill the user.

### 2. Tobacco is addictive.

Schools must be in the business of promoting health rather than enabling addictions. The use of tobacco is not just a “bad habit”— it is a powerful addiction. In fact, over (5) million people in Canada are addicted to tobacco and many are trying to quit smoking every year. In New Brunswick, 12,500 youth (under 19) use tobacco products.

### 3. Second-hand smoke and tobacco related materials are dangerous.

Schools are responsible for providing a safe environment for students. Second-hand smoke causes more than 4,700 deaths in Canada each year, making it the third major killer, after active smoking and alcohol. Second-hand smoke is particularly problematic for the growing number of children with asthma. Researchers looking at the health impact of second-hand smoke on children state simply, “Smoking should be banned wherever children are present”. Tobacco related material fires are a leading cause of fire deaths. More people die in fires caused by lighted tobacco products than other types of fires.

### 4. Tobacco use on school grounds provides a transition site for experimentation – to casual use – to a daily addictive practice.

School smoking areas are enabling sites to increase both the prevalence (rate) and consumption (amount) of tobacco. They provide a convenient place for youth to experiment with tobacco and engage in casual use of tobacco. As transition sites, school smoking areas allow casual users to use tobacco more regularly and increase their daily consumption. Smoking areas are perceived by youth as “sanctioning the use of tobacco”.

### 5. Middle and high school years are critical in determining whether or not an individual becomes a smoker for life.

Schools can help “delay the onset” of smoking and significantly reduce the chances that youth will ever use tobacco regularly. Schools can help students stay tobacco-free during their school years and thereby help them remain tobacco-free for life.

### 6. Tobacco is a gateway drug.

Schools must consider other “side effects” of tobacco use. As cited in the Surgeon General’s report, tobacco use has been found to play a pivotal role in the development of other drug dependencies, including alcohol and street drugs.

7. Allowing tobacco use at the school is in conflict with prevention messages delivered in classrooms.

Schools must send clear, consistent messages. Tobacco use prevention instruction is considered an essential element of comprehensive school health programs. School hallways and bulletin boards often “shout” the prevention message with posters and banners. How then are children to understand stepping outside their classrooms to view clusters of students and/or teachers using tobacco on school grounds? Schools that are not tobacco-free send conflicting messages to students about tobacco use.

8. Perceived social acceptance of tobacco use, accurate or otherwise, influences adolescent tobacco use behavior.

Schools can reduce children’s observation of tobacco use and take a firm stand against it. The idea that tobacco use is socially acceptable can be developed when youth witness others using tobacco or when they use it themselves without negative consequences.

9. Workplaces are becoming increasingly smoke-free.

Schools need to prepare students for the reality of smoke-free workplaces and communities. A 1994 survey of facility management professionals found that 71% of surveyed organizations prohibited smoking anywhere within their facility. This percentage has been increasing annually through increasing 100% smoke-free legislation.

10. Laws intentionally limit access and the sale of tobacco to children.

It is important that schools model respect for provincial laws. It is clear that the NB Tobacco Sales Act’s intent is to reduce youth access and use of tobacco. It is important that citizenship lessons are not only taught at school but also applied, and respect for the law is demonstrated. Schools that are not tobacco-free provide opportunities for the illegal sale or provision of tobacco products to youth under age 19 through social sources on school grounds. This can include social access to alcohol and street drugs as well. Children and youth learn what they live.

11. Schools may face liability issues by allowing tobacco use on their premises.

School districts would be wise to protect themselves from this unnecessary risk. Litigation related to tobacco addiction and exposure to secondhand smoke is growing. Although there are no cases on record yet, it is not inconceivable that in the future someone may question the role school personnel or district board members played in allowing addictions to develop through not enacting or enforcing tobacco-free policies.

12. It’s the right thing to do.

Establishing a tobacco-free school environment is not always the easiest thing to do, but it is the right thing to do to protect children and help them develop into healthy adults. Changes and restrictions on dangerous behaviours may well be met with initial resistance. But if schools and communities persist, there will be a reduction in the number of youth who become permanently addicted to tobacco, and ultimately a reduction in the number of deaths and diseases from tobacco use. Tobacco-Free Schools: It is simply the right thing to do!