

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Getting Ready for the New School Year? Talk to Your Kids about Tobacco Use**

Thousands of young people in the Panhandle are heading back to school. In the flurry to get ready for the school year, parents may not be thinking about keeping their kids from using tobacco products, but the start of the school year is an excellent time to talk to kids about tobacco use.

“Once kids start using tobacco, they can become addicted quickly,” said Tabi Prochazka, Tobacco Free in the Panhandle Coordinator with the Panhandle Prevention Coalition. “Addiction can lead to a lifetime of serious health problems. The best way for parents to protect their children from tobacco-related health problems is to prevent tobacco use altogether.”

Today’s tobacco products deliver more nicotine and deliver it quicker than ever before. Nicotine is the highly addictive drug in tobacco that keeps people using it, even when they want to quit. Like heroin and cocaine, nicotine changes the way the brain works causing users to crave repeated doses of nicotine. Youth are especially sensitive to nicotine and can feel dependent earlier than adults. Because of their addiction, about three out of four teen smokers end up smoking into adulthood, even if they intend to quit after a few years.

"Most people know that tobacco use can lead to disease and death in long-term, older smokers, but many are surprised to learn how early the negative impacts of tobacco use can occur" stated Prochazka. It’s important that parents know how early smoking can lead to nicotine addiction, early heart disease, and lung damage.

- Addiction to tobacco can happen at any age, but the younger they start using tobacco, the more likely youth will become addicted and the stronger their addiction will be.
- Most young smokers already show signs of cardiovascular damage. For example, the large blood vessel that feeds oxygen to the body’s major organs—the abdominal aorta—shows thickening of the walls through which blood passes to the rest of the body and already can contain fatty streaks in smokers as young as 15 or 16 years of age.
- Early smoking can lead to permanent lung damage. In addition to reducing lung function, smoking slows down lung growth. Because lungs continue growing and developing until young men and women reach their early 20s, youth who smoke may never develop full lung size or capacity. Such damage is permanent and increases the risk for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) later in life.

To help keep your children from starting to use tobacco, take these important steps:

- Tell your children how dangerous smoking is – and how addictive all tobacco products are.
- Make your home and your car tobacco-free for everyone – friends and guests as well as family members.
- Tell your children you expect them to be tobacco-free.
- Encourage your children to be involved in activities at school, church, or in the community.
- Don’t let your children see movies, TV programming, or video games that show tobacco use.
- Find out where your community stands on policies known to reduce tobacco use by youth, such as school-based tobacco bans, smoke-free policies, and higher prices on tobacco products.
- Set a good example by not using tobacco yourself.

For more information on tobacco prevention in the Panhandle, call (308)487-3600 ext 107 or visit [www.pphd.org/tfn.html](http://www.pphd.org/tfn.html)

Tobacco Free in the Panhandle is a collaborative effort that focuses on keeping youth from starting to use tobacco, reducing access to tobacco products, and increasing awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke. It's funded by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services/Tobacco Free Nebraska Program as a result of the tobacco master settlement agreement.