

- Potentially fatal lower respiratory tract infections (280 children die each year)
- Hospitalizations (7,500 to 15,000 among kids 18 months or younger)
- Ear infections (790,000 cases of otitis media each year)

Additionally, in 2013, there were more than 8,000 reports of potentially toxic exposure to tobacco and nicotine products among children 5 years old or younger, caused primarily by ingesting cigarettes. (With the rise in popularity of the e-cigarettes, [this number is increasing.](#))

Obviously fetal development and infancy aren't the only times parents need to worry about the effect of smoking on children. This needs to be a lifelong lesson.

Modeling a Tobacco-Free Standard

The vast majority of parents don't want their kids to use commercial tobacco. Fortunately, there are [effective actions they can take to protect their kids](#) from becoming another tobacco industry victim. U.S. tobacco companies spend **\$26 million per day** marketing their products, and they rely on youth smokers to replace their adult customers who quit or die. As one tobacco industry executive put it, "the base of our business is the high school student."

To protect their kids, parents can:

- Model a tobacco-free lifestyle. If [parents use tobacco, quit](#), and [share the struggles](#) with kids.
- Maintain a smoke-free home. A smoke-free home makes children less likely to smoke, even if their parents smoke.
- Make sure kids have the facts they need, including [immediate](#) health effects, effects on physical appearance and social acceptance.
- Give your kids the knowledge and resources they need to fight back against tobacco industry manipulation. Empowered kids can feel strong enough to withstand peer pressure.



Thankfully, parents aren't alone in this fight. [Schools are in a unique position](#) to play a powerful role in reducing the serious problem of smoking and other tobacco use by kids. Children spend almost a third of their waking time in school, about 135 hours a month; and much of the pressure kids feel regarding tobacco use occurs in school.

- Prohibit tobacco use by students, staff and visitors on all school grounds at all times. *This should include e-cigarette (or vaping) devices.*
- Provide comprehensive tobacco prevention education that addresses health, social influences, peer pressure, resistance and media literacy.
- Offer interactive tobacco-free projects. This will give the students ownership of the tobacco-free culture, while empowering them to make a positive difference. (Anyone who knows teenagers will understand their desire for independence and the importance of empowerment.)

By taking some of these steps, parents, schools and communities can have an enormous impact on the current and future health and well-being of their children.



While today's message may have been focused on parents and schools, hospitals aren't off the hook.

As the community health leader, parents, families, schools and community leaders need us to be there.

They need us to promote consistent health messages on tobacco use both in the clinical setting and in the community. *(They also need us to set an example by having a tobacco-free culture as well.)*

Remember, today's children and youth are our future work force. What we model for them today is what they will use to create their future.

While it's important to do all we can to give our kids a positive start to a successful school year, it's even more important that we do all we can to give them a healthy start in life.

Until next week,

Oklahoma Strategic Tribal Alliance for Health (OSTAH)
Margie Burkhart
Cherokee Nation Healthy Nation



Oklahoma Hospital Association (OHA)
Jennifer W. Roysdon
Hospitals Helping Patients Quit



"There is no clinical treatment available today that can reduce illness, prevent death, and increase quality of life more than effective tobacco treatment interventions."

-Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence, US Public Health Service, US Dept. of Health and Human Services