



TobaccoFreeBaseball.org

It's Time To Take Tobacco Out of Baseball

Smokeless tobacco use by Major League Baseball (MLB) players endangers the health of impressionable youth who follow their lead, as well as the players themselves. It sets a terrible example for the millions of young people who watch baseball and see players and managers using tobacco. It is time to take tobacco out of baseball once and for all – both to set the right example for America's kids and for the health of baseball players.

PROBLEM

Recent headlines have driven home the seriousness of the problem. In June 2014, Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn died at age 54 after a long battle with salivary gland cancer, which he attributed to his longtime use of chewing tobacco. Two months later, pitching great Curt Schilling, only 47, announced his treatment for oral cancer that he said was “without a doubt, unquestionably” caused by 30 years of chewing tobacco. How much more tragic news should we have to endure? Face facts:

- **Smokeless tobacco is harmful to health**

Public health authorities, including the U.S. Surgeon General and the National Cancer Institute, have found that smokeless tobacco use is hazardous to health and can lead to nicotine addiction. Smokeless tobacco contains at least 28 cancer-causing chemicals and causes oral, pancreatic and esophageal cancer – as well as other health problems.

- **Too many kids — especially athletes — are using smokeless tobacco**

Even as cigarette use continues a steady decline among youth, smokeless tobacco use has remained troublingly steady. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2015, 11.9 percent of high school boys reported current use of smokeless tobacco products. A September 2015 CDC report found that high school athletes use smokeless tobacco at nearly twice the rate of non-athletes, and smokeless tobacco use among athletes increased 11 percent from 2001 to 2013, even as smoking rates dropped significantly. Among male high school athletes, smokeless tobacco use was particularly alarming at 17.4 percent in 2013. Each year, about half a million kids age 12-17 use smokeless tobacco for the first time.

- **Tobacco use in baseball reinforces tobacco marketing**

Smokeless tobacco companies spent more than \$500 million on marketing in 2013 (the most recent year available), three times the amount spent in 1998. Smokeless tobacco use in baseball reinforces the industry's message that teen boys can't be real men unless they chew.



- **Professional baseball players are role models for youth**

A CDC expert stated, "Athletes serve as role models for youth, and smokeless tobacco manufacturers have used advertising, images, and testimonials featuring athletes and sports to make smokeless tobacco products appear attractive to youth."

SOLUTION

It's time for city and state leaders to step up to the plate and protect our kids by passing laws to make the game of baseball completely tobacco-free.

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For years, leading health organizations have called for an end to smokeless tobacco in baseball. Our major campaign in 2010-2011 made some strides – including securing a prohibition on players carrying tobacco tins in their uniforms and using smokeless tobacco during TV interviews. But these restrictions did not eliminate smokeless tobacco use at ballparks – the step that can best prevent young people from ever starting down the road to addiction, disease and premature death. It's time — finally — to take tobacco out of baseball completely. The obvious solution is for MLB and the players association to agree to rid baseball of tobacco for good. However, the league cannot unilaterally prohibit smokeless tobacco and no agreement has been reached to date.

Since baseball has been unable to address this threat to kids across the country, it's now up to cities and states with major league teams to step up and protect our kids. They can take a critical step by prohibiting use of all tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco, at baseball venues. Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco have now passed such laws, with more cities to follow.

RATIONALE

Such legislation sends a simple and powerful message to kids: baseball and tobacco don't mix. Our national pastime should be about promoting a healthy and active lifestyle, not a deadly and addictive product.

This action will not affect what players can do in their personal lives, although they should be encouraged to quit using tobacco for their own health. Baseball stadiums, however, are workplaces and public places. It's entirely appropriate to restrict the use of a harmful substance in such a setting. While players are on the job — on the field or in front of a camera — they have a responsibility to set the right example for kids.