



TobaccoFreeBaseball.org

# We're Taking 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**

Major headlines in recent years have driven home the seriousness of the problem. In June 2014, Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn died at age 54 after 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? Here are the 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. Smokeless tobacco use increases the risk of death when users have heart attacks or strokes.
- **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 2017, 7.7 percent of high school boys reported current use of smokeless tobacco products. A different survey 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 day, more than 1,000 kids age 12-17 use smokeless tobacco for the first time.

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

Smokeless tobacco companies are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to get young people to use their products. In fact, marketing and promotional expenditures for the top five smokeless tobacco companies totaled \$759.3 million in 2016 (the most recent year available). Smokeless tobacco continues to be heavily advertised in magazines with large youth readerships, often with a message telling teen boys they can't be real men without smokeless tobacco. The ads have tag lines like "May cause the urge to act like a man." Smokeless tobacco use in baseball reinforces that message.



- **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."

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

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## **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.

For years, leading health organizations have called for an end to smokeless tobacco in baseball. Our campaign in 2010-2011 made strides – including securing a prohibition on players carrying tobacco tins in their uniforms and using smokeless tobacco during TV interviews. The 2016 collective bargaining agreement between owners and players prohibits all new MLB players from using smokeless tobacco. 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 to take tobacco out of baseball completely.

It's now up to cities and states with major league teams to step up and protect our kids. Half of MLB stadiums (15 of 30) are now completely tobacco-free as a result of state and local laws prohibiting use of all tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco, at baseball venues. MLB cities covered by such laws include Anaheim, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Oakland, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, Tampa Bay (St. Petersburg), and Washington, D.C. The remaining MLB cities must act sooner rather than later to break the link between baseball and tobacco for good.

## **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.