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## **Sarasota County joins celebration of Tobacco Free Florida Week**

Sarasota County will join in the statewide celebration of the fifth annual Tobacco Free Florida Week, which runs from April 6-13. The theme of the observance, "High Five: Celebrating Five Years of Tobacco Free Florida Week," highlights progress made in protecting our residents from tobacco's deadly toll.

The Tobacco Free Partnership of Sarasota County (TFP) works in collaboration with the Florida Department of Health's Bureau of Tobacco Free Florida to educate youths about the harmful effects of tobacco use, aid current tobacco users in their efforts to quit, and bring to light the impact tobacco has on our community's health and economy.

"Comprehensive tobacco control programs like Tobacco Free Florida work," said Sarasota County Tobacco Program Manager Jeanette Robinson. "Today, there are fewer adult tobacco users, fewer youth starting to use tobacco, and fewer people in our community exposed to secondhand smoke. Over the past five years, we have seen remarkable success in protecting residents across the state from tobacco's deadly toll."

According to state health officials, Tobacco Free Florida has helped 72,000 people quit through its Three Ways to Quit services. The return on investment for smokers is notable; there is an estimated savings of \$9,500 in health care costs over a lifetime when an adult smoker quits smoking. In the past five years, over a half million adults and 70,000 youths have stopped smoking, saving about \$4.2 billion in personal health care costs.

Secondhand smoke is also a concern. Health officials say that there are more than 220,000 fewer youths in Florida exposed to secondhand smoke, which contains a deadly mix of more than 7,000 chemicals, hundreds of which are toxic and 69 that can cause cancer.

Through the [Healthy Sarasota County Workplace Initiative](#), the Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County and the TFP assist employees in worksite settings to access cessation resources through their benefits packages, as well as supports employers in developing Tobacco Free Workplace Policy initiatives to reduce smoking and secondhand smoke exposure.

National surveys among adult smokers show that nine out of 10 smokers initiated the habit in their teen years. The Florida Tobacco Youth Survey data for Sarasota County has shown a significant decrease in smoking among teens who reported smoking in the last 30 days, declining from 23.8 percent in 2010 to 16.8 percent in 2012.

"We believe that this decrease is at least in part the result of the energy that local youths who are engaged in the Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) bring to their schools, neighborhoods and peer groups around smoking and tobacco use," said Robinson.

To counteract the impact of tobacco messages to youth, SWAT members mobilized to help get resolutions passed in Sarasota County and the cities of Sarasota, Venice and North Port, urging vendors to cease the sale and marketing of all candy-flavored tobacco products, which target youth.

These local efforts are supported by a statewide media campaign driven by powerful advertisements that demonstrate the dangers and real-life consequences of tobacco use, inspiring Floridians to quit and encouraging youth to never start. Research shows that hard-hitting media campaigns are effective.

"Each year, Tobacco Free Florida week turns up the heat on tobacco by educating Floridians about the dangers to health from smoking and chewing tobacco," said State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health Dr. John Armstrong. "Florida has seen remarkable success in reducing smoking rates in recent years, one of the program's many accomplishments that we will celebrate during this five-year anniversary."

The Florida Department of Health's Tobacco Free Florida campaign is a statewide cessation and prevention campaign funded by Florida's tobacco settlement fund. Tobacco Free Florida offers a number of free and convenient resources to help smokers quit.

- **Telephone:** Call the Florida Quitline at 1-877-U-CAN-NOW to speak with a Quit Coach who will help you assess your addiction and help you create a personalized quit plan.
- **Online:** Enroll in the Web Coach®, which will help you create your own Web-based quit plan that's right for you. Visit <https://www.quitnow.net/florida>.
- **In person:** Visit the Gulfcoast Area Health Education Center (AHEC) website, [www.gsahec.org](http://www.gsahec.org), to locate additional Quit Smoking Now group classes. The organization's local toll-free tobacco referral line is 866-534-7909. The Florida Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Network's website is [www.ahectobacco.com](http://www.ahectobacco.com)

For more information on how you can join the Tobacco Free Partnership of Sarasota County coalition in the fight against tobacco and working toward a tobacco-free Sarasota County, call 941-861-2805 or visit [www.sarasotahealth.org](http://www.sarasotahealth.org).

To learn about Tobacco Free Florida and the state's free quit smoking resources, visit [www.tobaccofreeflorida.com](http://www.tobaccofreeflorida.com) or follow the campaign on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/TobaccoFreeFlorida](https://www.facebook.com/TobaccoFreeFlorida) or Twitter at [www.twitter.com/tobaccofreefla](https://www.twitter.com/tobaccofreefla).

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