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## **Great American Smokeout Update**

According to the CDC, nearly 40 million U.S. adults still smoke cigarettes, and about 4.7 million middle and high school students use at least one tobacco product, including e-cigarettes. Every day, about 1,600 U.S. youth younger than 18 years smoke their first cigarette. And in 2018, the Truth Initiative cited that 20.5% of adults smoked. Nationally, the rate was 16.1%. In 2019, 6.6% of high school students in Mississippi smoked cigarettes on at least one day in the past 30 days.

BU's top priority is getting the message out to youth to quit smoking. To aid in this effort is the Great American Smokeout. The Great American Smokeout is an annual campaign sponsored by the American Cancer Society. The purpose of this annual event is to bring awareness to encourage people to make a plan to quit, or to plan in advance and quit smoking.

The BU Youth Leaders participate in this annual initiative by sponsoring events at their schools. The goal of these events is to educate their peers about the harmful effects of tobacco and vaping products. They also encourage their

peers to pledge to be tobacco and vape free by signing a pledge card. As a result of participating in the Great American Smokeout campaign, the BU Youth Leaders have educated over 8,000 of their peers over the past three years.



Charleston High School Great American Smokeout 2021



## **Be a Good Neighbor**

We are all familiar with the commercial “Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.” Well, BU can say the same for our youth leaders. They have visited local retailer stores near their high schools and educated them on the tobacco and vaping laws regarding minors. As cited on tobacco 21.org, Congress passed a \$1.37 trillion spending bill that included a provision to raise the minimum legal sales age for all tobacco products from 18 to 21 nationwide. Upon the President’s signature on December 20, 2019, the age change became effective immediately. Below are highlights of the bill:

- It is now a violation of federal law for any retailer to sell any nicotine or tobacco products to anyone under the age of 21.
- FDA will oversee enforcement of the minimum legal sales age at 21. (Due to the dramatic increase in e-cigarette usage by middle and high school age youth since 2016, there is an opportunity to strengthen local and state level enforcement measures around all

tobacco and nicotine products to supplement the FDA's national efforts.)

- There are no exemptions for sales to members of the military who are under 21.
- The law does not phase-in age restrictions (i.e., there is no “grandfathering”) of those who are currently 18, 19 or 20.
- The law does not preempt cities, counties, or states from passing and enforcing their own age restriction laws and does not preempt Tobacco 21 laws already in place in cities, counties, and states.
- The law penalizes retailers for selling tobacco products to youth, not those attempting to purchase, although many states and cities retain purchase, use, and possession (PUP) laws.
- The law does not require that states pass laws to raise their sales age to 21, but it does require states to demonstrate that their retailers are complying with the law. If not, the state eventually risks losing some portion of their federal substance abuse grant funding.



Forest Hill High School



Laurel High School

## Mississippi's Newest Change Makers

Youth in Mississippi sometimes gets a bad rep. In an article from [gulflive.com](http://gulflive.com), Mississippi schools are among the worst in the nation. Outlined in the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 42.7% of Mississippi public high school students have never smoked cigarettes, compared to 32.3% nationally. This difference was significant. Yes, this looks bleak, however, the BU Youth Leaders are doing their part to turn this trend around.

This year, they have participated in city hall and school board meetings informing them of this trend and how we need to update policies and ordinances, so real change can take place. That is huge! These youth are flexing their muscles with the elected officials in their communities. So, yes, the BU Youth Leaders are Mississippi's newest change makers. Be on the lookout for them in your area!



Northern Region Youth Leaders



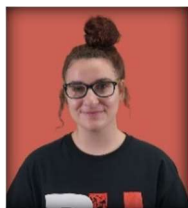
Central Region Youth Leaders



Southern Region Youth Leaders

## **BU Youth Leaders' Corner**

"I like the BU Program because it helps me become more confident in helping people. It helps me educate others on the dangers and effects of tobacco. It also helps me meet new friends close to where I'm from." - **Elizabeth Willard (BU Youth Leader at Charleston High School)**



- Test to prevent spread to others.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.



## **Covid-19 Omicron Variant**

The virus that causes COVID-19 is constantly changing, and new variants of the virus are expected to occur. Sometimes new variants emerge and disappear. Other times, new variants persist. Numerous variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 are being tracked in the United States and globally during this pandemic.

On November 26, 2021, WHO named the B.1.1.529 Omicron and classified it as a Variant of Concern (VOC). On November 30, 2021, the United States designated Omicron as a Variant of Concern, and on December 1, 2021 the first confirmed U.S. case of Omicron was identified.

### **Important Ways to Slow the Spread of COVID-19:**

- Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can.
- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth to help protect yourself and others.
- Stay 6 feet apart from others who don't live with you.
- Avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces.

## **Contact Us**

Contact us with your questions, concerns, or testimonies. For additional updates on the Youth Tobacco & Vaping Prevention Program, follow us on social media.

### **Caffee, Caffee & Associates Public Health Foundation, Inc.**

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This program is funded by a grant from the Mississippi State Department of Health – Office of Tobacco Control.