**Why Are Substance-Free Playgrounds Important?**

1) Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States, as well as in Mason County, Michigan, leading to more deaths than most other leading causes combined (including AIDS, motor vehicle accidents, firearms, murders, suicides and fires) (1).

2) E-cigarette use (or “vaping”) has grown in popularity among teens and is now the most commonly used form of nicotine among youth in the United States. Risks of vaping include primarily nicotine addiction, which can disrupt brain development in youth; and respiratory illness and disease associated with breathing in harmful chemicals from e-cig flavorings and the device itself (2, 12).

3) Secondhand smoke and vapor contain many harmful chemicals and cancer-causing agents and is a serious health risk to human beings, especially to infants, children and pregnant women (3).

4) Alcohol use is the third most preventable cause of death in the United States, leading to 88,000 alcohol-related deaths among men and women in the U.S. each year. Excessive alcohol use increases a person’s risk for cancer of the mouth, esophagus, pharynx, larynx, liver and breast, and contributes to thousands of liver disease deaths each year (6, 7, 8).

5) Marijuana use, particularly long-term use, has been linked to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Research also suggests that marijuana use during adolescence can increase a person’s likelihood of developing psychosis, if they have a genetic risk for schizophrenia. Marijuana use also impacts a person’s ability to operate a vehicle safely and is the most common illicit drug found in the blood of drivers involved in fatal and non-fatal vehicle crashes (9, 10).

6) Cigarette butts may be harmful to children and animals who mistakenly ingest them, as evidenced by the nearly 8,000 reports to the Poison Control Center of children poisoned by the ingestion of cigarette butts (4,5).

7) Studies show that 90% of substance use addiction begins in adolescence, and teens and children who are exposed to alcohol and drug use (i.e. when it is a “norm” in their home or peer environment) are more apt to experiment in their teen years (11).

8) The use of substances are harmful to the health of both adults and children and sets an unhealthy example for the youth and children of Mason County (14).

9) Substance-free recreation and playgrounds encourage positive role modeling for youth and supports the process of changing social norms around substance use (13).

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