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Republika ng Pilipinas  
**Kagawaran ng Edukasyon**  
Tanggapan ng Pangalawang Kalihim

**DepEd Task Force COVID-19**  
**MEMORANDUM No. 39**  
30 April 2020

For: **Undersecretaries**  
**Assistant Secretaries**  
**Bureau and Service Directors**  
**Regional Directors**  
**Schools Division Superintendents**  
**School Heads**  
**All Others Concerned**

Subject: **STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF TOBACCO CONTROL POLICIES,  
INCLUDING SMOKE-FREE AND VAPE-FREE POLICIES,  
DURING THE ENHANCED AND GENERAL COMMUNITY  
QUARANTINE**

## I. Background

With the ongoing national health emergency related to COVID-19 and in support of the national government's and specifically the Department of Education's efforts to respond to the crisis, all are enjoined to ensure the strict enforcement of tobacco control policies that govern DepEd (Annex A), which includes the following:

1. **Prohibit smoking and the use of Electronic Nicotine and Non-Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS/ENNDS)** - commonly known as vape or e-cigarette - within the premises of all DepEd schools and offices;
2. Order schools through their respective Child Protection Committees, in coordination with their respective LGUs, to ensure that **no tobacco products and ENDS/ENNDS are sold within 100 meters from any point of the perimeter of the school**; and
3. **Warn against unnecessary interaction with the tobacco industry**, including the prohibition on sponsorships by tobacco companies and other organizations that receive funds from tobacco companies.



### Office of the Undersecretary for Administration (OUA)

[Administrative Service (AS), Information and Communications Technology Service (ICTS), Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service (DRRMS), Bureau of Learner Support Services (BLSS), Baguio Teachers' Camp (BTC), Central Security & Safety Office (CSSO)]

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More than ensuring compliance to government issuances, this reiteration is especially made during this crisis primarily for the **protection of the health of learners and personnel.**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has made the following reminders:

1. **Quitting smoking** is one of the ways that people with non-communicable diseases/pre-existing conditions can **stay safe** during COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>1</sup>
2. **People who smoke are likely to be more vulnerable to COVID-19.** Smoking damages the lungs and other parts of the body, putting people who smoke at greater risk of getting severe cases of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>
3. **Smoking can increase a person's chances of getting COVID-19.** Bringing one's hands to their mouth can transfer the virus into their body. Sharing tobacco products can transmit the virus between people. Tobacco weakens a person's respiratory system making them more vulnerable to the virus.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the Department of Health (DOH) has also reinforced these key messages:

1. **The virus doesn't discriminate. Neither should we.** Smokers are likely to suffer severe symptoms if they catch COVID-19. Instead of harming or isolating smokers, help them quit to protect themselves from the virus.<sup>4</sup> Stop smoking to help protect yourself and those around you from COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>
2. **What is the relationship between smoking and COVID-19?** Emerging research shows that smokers are more likely to experience severe illness if they contract COVID-19. Smokers who catch COVID-19 are more likely to need ventilators and are also more likely to have respiratory complications.<sup>6</sup>
3. **Why is smoking a risk factor for COVID-19?** Smoking is a risk factor because of two main reasons: (1) it is known to weaken a person's immune system, making it much less effective in fighting off infections like COVID-19; and (2) it can cause lung disease or otherwise damage and weaken the lungs. Those with pre-existing or chronic respiratory disease and those with weaker lungs, like smokers, are thus more likely to be severely affected by respiratory viruses like COVID-19.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/whophilippines/posts/2780433035403284>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/photos/a.167668209945237/3015563535155676/>,

<https://www.facebook.com/whophilippines/photos/a.486389418141002/2780418202071434/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/photos/a.167668209945237/3014191245292905/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilippines/photos/a.102072054777318/126656115652245/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilippines/photos/a.102072054777318/126146562369867/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilippines/photos/a.127161992268324/127162052268318/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilippines/photos/a.127161992268324/127162115601645/>



4. **What should smokers do to lower their risk of contracting COVID-19?**

Do your best to stop smoking. This is good for the people around you too - inhaling secondhand smoke can be just as damaging as smoking. Continue other measures, such as staying at least one meter away from others, washing your hands frequently, wearing a mask in public, and covering your mouth and nose when you sneeze.<sup>8</sup>

5. **What health benefits are there for people who quit smoking?**

If you quit smoking, you are: (1) able to breathe, smell, and taste better; (2) less likely to get lung disease, lung cancer, and other forms of cancer; (3) less likely to have heart disease, strokes, or other cardiovascular diseases; (4) less likely to experience constant coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath; and (5) less likely to be infertile or impotent and less likely to miscarry or have premature births.<sup>9</sup>

6. **What health benefits are there for those around people who quit smoking?**

Those around you are also: (1) less likely to be exposed to thousands of chemicals in secondhand smoke, hundreds of which are toxic; (2) less likely to develop lung cancer and other respiratory diseases; (3) less likely to develop heart disease or experience strokes; and (4) less likely to experience bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma, and chronic symptoms like wheezing and coughing.<sup>10</sup>

7. **How does one quit smoking?**

Develop a quit plan, and stick to it: (1) Set a quit date. Work toward smoking less and less as you approach it. (2) Tell your friends, family, and co-workers. Ask for their support and encouragement, or ask them not to smoke around you. (3) Anticipate challenges. Understand that it will be difficult, especially at first, but remind yourself of all the good reasons why you are quitting. (4) Remove tobacco products from your environment. Throw away tobacco products, avoid smoking areas, and ask your peers not to smoke around you.

(It's normal for smokers to try to quit more than once. Learn from relapses, then try again. Remember that you can quit, as long as you stick to your goals!)<sup>11</sup>

8. **What should a person do to help a friend or family member stop smoking?**

Be as supportive as possible by: (1) praising them for attempting to quit; (2) giving encouraging words when they need it; (3) removing tobacco products, ash trays, and lighters from around them; (4) spending time with them doing things they like to keep their minds away from smoking; and (5) encouraging them to learn from their experience and try again if they relapse.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilipinas/photos/a.127161992268324/127162155601641/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilipinas/photos/a.127161992268324/127162192268304/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilipinas/photos/a.127161992268324/127162232268300/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilipinas/photos/a.127161992268324/127162272268296/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilipinas/photos/a.127161992268324/127162305601626/>



9. **What should a person do to overcome their fear and anxiety about smokers and people who may have COVID-19?**

Understand that anyone can get infected with COVID-19, not just smokers. Show empathy and kindness to everyone, including smokers who are trying to quit. Do not let your fear or negative preconceptions of those who smoke or those who have COVID-19 turn into harmful actions against them. Remember, we should #HealAsOne.<sup>13</sup>

10. **Why do we need to stop stigmatizing smokers?**

Stigma can discourage smokers from seeking help or trying to quit. If they catch COVID-19, they may not seek medical care or they may try to hide their illness out of shame. Stigma will not stop smokers from smoking, nor will it cure COVID-19. Practice Social Distancing, not Social Isolation. Do not reject, abuse, harass, or harm anyone. Protect yourself by practicing social distancing, but remain supportive of others. Do not let other people feel they are isolated, discriminated, or not accepted in your community.<sup>14</sup>

## **II. Protecting people from the harms of smoking, offering help to quit**

**Absolute smoking ban** shall continue to be observed in all DepEd offices and schools, especially schools that are being utilized by their respective local government units (LGUs) for COVID-19 response.

The ongoing community quarantines across the country may also serve as the best time for DepEd personnel who smoke or use ENDS/ENNDS to **quit smoking or ENDS/ENNDS use**.

Designated Brief Tobacco Intervention (BTI) Providers of the Regional Offices and Schools Division Offices, per DepEd Memorandum No. 110, s. 2019, especially those who have been trained by the Lung Center of the Philippines, are enjoined to provide the necessary assistance to personnel who are interested to quit smoking. BTI may be provided remotely through phone calls or similar platforms. Alternatively, personnel who are interested to quit smoking may avail of the services provided by the DOH Quitline through: <https://www.facebook.com/DOHQuitlineofficial/>. The operations through the hotlines are temporarily suspended, but services through Facebook Messenger continue.

## **III. Protecting the youth from accessing tobacco products**

All schools, through their respective Child Protection Committees, with the technical support of their respective Regional and Division Tobacco Control Coordinators, are enjoined to coordinate with their respective LGUs to ensure that the prohibition on the sale or distribution of tobacco products<sup>15</sup> and ENDS/ENNDS<sup>16</sup> within 100 meters from any point of the perimeter of the school is

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilipinas/photos/a.127161992268324/127162362268287/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DOHhealthphilipinas/photos/a.127161992268324/127162385601618/>

<sup>15</sup> RA 9211

<sup>16</sup> EO 106, s. 2020



strictly implemented.

Some local governments such as the local governments of General Luna, Quezon,<sup>17</sup> San Antonio, Nueva Ecija,<sup>18</sup> and Masantol, Pampanga<sup>19</sup> have imposed a ban on the sale of tobacco products in their entire municipalities, even in areas that are beyond the 100-meter perimeter of facilities frequented particularly by minors. DepEd appreciates this move of the said LGUs and hopes that other LGUs can do the same.

DO 48, s. 2016 provides that DepEd shall “coordinate closely with... LGUs for... pushing for legislation on tobacco control...” As such, all schools are further enjoined to take advantage of the quarantine to push for such legislative measures in their respective localities.

Attached is a **letter template** that Schools Division Offices and schools may use in communicating this matter to their respective local chief executives (Annex B). The letter shall be modified depending on the context of the LGU. For example, some LGUs may have already implemented a Liquor Ban, and this can be cited in the letter as a good health measure to commend. The soft copy of the template can be downloaded from **[bit.ly/dearLGUbantobacco](https://bit.ly/dearLGUbantobacco)** through official DepEd email accounts.

#### **IV. Protecting DepEd from tobacco industry interference**

All DepEd personnel are also reminded to remain vigilant for any possible interference from the tobacco industry during the community quarantine and the ongoing national response to COVID-19. This includes their possible sponsorship of educational trainings and activities, as well as donations of personal protective equipment and sanitizers, among others, even those coursed through front non-government organizations and foundations.

While the Department shall always be cautious all year not to have even a perception of partnership with the tobacco industry, it shall not let its guard down just because of the community quarantine. In fact, this may actually be the best time to intensify efforts to protect DepEd and the youth from the tobacco industry.

According to the WHO, “the tobacco industry is creating controversy and confusion about the risk of nicotine and tobacco product use and COVID-19. (Fact: Health experts have warned that smokers with COVID-19 likely suffer more serious conditions that could lead to premature death).”<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the WHO also said that “tobacco lobbyists have tried to manipulate COVID-19 policymaking to get tobacco shops listed as 'essential' and offer free delivery of tobacco products to people in quarantine. Smokers likely face more severe symptoms if infected, leading to hospitalizations and premature deaths.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1250558/quezon-town-temporarily-bans-cigarettes-amid-covid-19-threat>

<sup>18</sup> <https://journal.com.ph/news/provincial/ecija-mayor-imposes-total-ban-sin-products-during-ecq>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1853917>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/photos/a.167668209945237/3085570238155005/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/photos/a.750907108288008/3087623131283049/>



Such tactics are against DepEd core values as an institution and provide more reasons to have no dealings with the tobacco industry.

DO 48, s. 2016 prohibits DepEd officials and personnel from any form of unnecessary interaction with the tobacco industry. As a requirement, partners are required to include a stipulation in the partnership instrument entered to with them (e.g., Memorandum of Agreement, Deed of Donation) that they are not related to or funded by the tobacco industry. Meanwhile, officials and personnel who violate the said provision of the policy may face administrative charges.

For wide dissemination and compliance.

  
  
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