

An Oral Health America Program



NATIONAL SPIT TOBACCO EDUCATION PROGRAM

What is NSTEP?

Oral Health America's National Spit Tobacco Education Program (NSTEP) was founded in 1994 as an effort to educate the baseball family and the American public about the dangers of smokeless or spit tobacco, and break the long-standing link between this potentially deadly drug and America's pastime. Each year, anywhere from 10 to 16 million Americans put their health at risk by using spit tobacco products.

The National Spit Tobacco Education Program's mission is to prevent people, especially young people, from starting to use spit tobacco, and to help all users quit. NSTEP is funded in part by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The History of NSTEP

Throughout its history, Oral Health America's National Spit Tobacco Education Program (NSTEP) has been spearheaded by National Chairman, Joe Garagiola. Garagiola was drawn to the cause by the death of a friend, former Major Leaguer and Minor League manager Jack Krol, from smokeless ("spit") tobacco-induced oral cancer. He has since worked tirelessly to educate people everywhere that "smokeless does not mean harmless." Garagiola is especially committed to alerting young people and their parents, teachers, and coaches to spit tobacco's harmful effects, and has successfully marshaled many arms of organized baseball to this crusade.

Since its establishment in 1994, NSTEP has partnered with the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society (PBATS), the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA), and Little League Baseball, Incorporated. The program has sought to sever the long-standing connection between spit tobacco products and America's pastime, to encourage a new generation of baseball players not to use spit tobacco products, and to inform the American public about the close association of spit tobacco with oral cancer and other serious health conditions.

In 1996, a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) allowed the program to operate at full capacity. NSTEP community coordinators were strategically assigned to high-use regions across the country to support spit tobacco education, prevention, and cessation efforts. Since then, NSTEP has been an increasingly vocal presence, affecting declines in use by teenagers, and calling for changes in the distribution, taxation, and advertising of spit tobacco products.

In early 2000, NSTEP negotiated a partnership between Major League Baseball (MLB) and MLB Players Association to sponsor NSTEP Spring Training activities. At Spring Training, the program offered soft-tissue oral examinations, cessation counseling, and educational presentations on the causes and effects of oral cancer to Major League players and coaching staff. During the course of the 2000 season, NSTEP also brokered partnerships with Minor League Baseball and the Crown Council, a national organization of dental practitioners committed to promoting good oral health through community-based charitable activities. NSTEP and the Crown Council provides over 4000 Minor League ballplayers and staff with educational programming, oral examinations, and cessation counseling during Spring Training, effectively reinforcing Minor League Baseball's tobacco-free policy (in place since 1993).

In addition, NSTEP has received a new three-year grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to integrate a spit tobacco initiative into local tobacco control efforts in 20+ high-use communities. NSTEP Community Coordinators and staff are working with Minor League Baseball, oral health professionals and students, and tobacco control groups to educate athletes, coaches, teachers, health care providers, students, and many others about the hazards of spit tobacco use. This grassroots effort will also foster ties between the Minor League teams and the communities in which they play.