

Tobacco Use and the Health of Young People

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Tobacco Use by Young People

- Each day in the United States, approximately 4,000 adolescents aged 12–17 try their first cigarette.¹
- Each year cigarette smoking accounts for approximately 1 of every 5 deaths, or about 438,000 people. Cigarette smoking results in 5.5 million years of potential life lost in the United States annually.²
- Although the percentage of high school students who smoke has declined in recent years, rates remain high: 20% of high school students report current cigarette use (smoked cigarettes on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).³
- Fifty percent of high school students have ever tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs.³
- Fourteen percent of high school students have smoked a whole cigarette before age 13.³
- Nearly eight percent of high school students (13% of male and 2% of female students) used smokeless tobacco (e.g., chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip), on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey.³ Adolescents who use smokeless tobacco are more likely than nonusers to become cigarette smokers.⁴
- Fourteen percent of high school students smoked cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey.³

Prevalence of Current Cigarette Use Among High School Students, 2007³

Racial/Ethnic Group	Male	Female	Overall
Black (Non-Hispanic)	14.9%	8.4%	11.6%
Hispanic	18.7%	14.6%	16.7%
White (Non-Hispanic)	23.8%	22.5%	23.2%

Health Effects of Tobacco Use by Young People

- Cigarette smoking by young people leads to immediate and serious health problems including respiratory and nonrespiratory effects, addiction to nicotine, and the associated risk of other drug use.^{4,5}
- Smoking at an early age increases the risk of lung cancer. For most smoking-related cancers, the risk rises as the individual continues to smoke.^{4,5}
- Cigarette smoking causes heart disease, stroke, chronic lung disease, and cancers of the lung, mouth, pharynx, esophagus, and bladder.^{4,5}
- Use of smokeless tobacco causes cancers of the mouth, pharynx and esophagus; gum recession; and an increased risk for health disease and stroke.^{4,5}
- Smoking cigars increases the risk of oral, laryngeal, esophageal, and lung cancers.^{5,6}

Nicotine Addiction Among Young People

- The younger people begin smoking cigarettes, the more likely they are to become strongly addicted to nicotine. Young people who try to quit suffer the same nicotine withdrawal symptoms as adults who try to quit.⁴
- Several studies have found nicotine to be addictive in ways similar to heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. Of all addictive behaviors, cigarette smoking is the one most likely to become established during adolescence.⁴ Among high school students who are current smokers, 50% have tried to quit smoking cigarettes during the 12 months before the survey.³

Tobacco Sales and Promoting to Youth

- All states have laws making it illegal to sell cigarettes to anyone under the age of 18, yet 16% of students under the age of 18 who currently smoke cigarettes reported they usually obtained their own cigarettes by buying them in a store or gas station during the 30 days before the survey.³
- Cigarette companies spent more than \$15.2 billion in 2003 to promote their products.⁷
- Children and teenagers constitute the majority of all new smokers, and the industry's advertising and promotion campaigns often have special appeal to these young people.⁸
- Eighty-three percent of young smokers (aged 12–17) choose the three most heavily advertised brands.⁹

Health Effects of Secondhand Smoke in Youth

- An estimated 10–11 million youth aged 12–18 live in a household with at least one smoker, and over 6 million are exposed to secondhand smoke daily.¹⁰
- Those most affected by secondhand smoke are children. Because their bodies are still developing, exposure to the poisons in secondhand smoke puts children in danger of severe respiratory diseases and may hinder the growth of their lungs.^{5,11}
- Secondhand smoke exposure during childhood and adolescence may contribute to new cases of asthma or worsen existing asthma.^{5,11}
- There is no risk-free level of secondhand smoke exposure. Even brief exposure can be dangerous.¹¹

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