

Executive Summary

The effects of tobacco are well-known and wide-ranging. Tobacco is an addictive drug that hurts the people using it, as well their families, friends and acquaintances, through exposure to secondhand smoke. Its cost is felt financially, emotionally and physically. Laws have been enacted to prevent youth from using tobacco, but many youth still start smoking or chewing in middle or high school.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), using analysis of state comprehensive tobacco control programs, has developed a set of best practices with four main goals. Those goals are to:

- Prevent the initiation of tobacco use among young people;
- Eliminate nonsmokers' exposure to secondhand smoke;
- Promote quitting among adults and young people; and
- Identify and eliminate tobacco-related disparities.

One of the key components to these best practices is surveillance and evaluation, which gives planners the information to determine programs and policymakers (and others responsible for fiscal oversight) a way of monitoring outcomes. The Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) is a tool developed by CDC to measure students' tobacco-related knowledge, behaviors and attitudes.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health, Division of Tobacco Control and Prevention conducted the YTS during the fall and winter of the 2010/11 school year. The results of this survey are intended for use by tobacco control program staff, researchers, healthcare providers, local health departments, community partners and concerned private citizens.

This report shows that while significant strides have been made toward reducing the impact of tobacco on youth, there is still a large tobacco influence in Pennsylvania, with all its associated costs. Many indicators are unchanged since the last survey, which was conducted in 2008/09. Below are highlights from the report.

Prevalence

- ~ In the 2010/11 school year, 3 percent of middle school students (95 % CI= 2-5 percent) smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days, which is unchanged since 2008/09.
- ~ Nineteen percent of high school students (CI=15-22 percent) in the school year 2010/11 smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days, which is not significantly different from the 2008//09 rate of 18 percent (CI=16-21 percent).
- ~ There were no significant differences in the rates of smoking between males and females in either high school or middle school.
- ~ Two percent (CI=2-3 percent) of middle school students and 8 percent (CI=6-11 percent) of high school students used smokeless tobacco in the past 30 days based on the 2010/11 survey. These estimates are unchanged since 2008/09.

Access

- ~ Among high school students who purchased cigarettes in the past 30 days, approximately 48 percent (CI=42-54 percent) were asked for proof of age.
- ~ Among high school students who purchased cigarettes in the past 30 days, approximately 29 percent (CI=23-36 percent) were denied the sale because of their age.

Cessation

- ~ When asked how long they can go before feeling the need for a cigarette, 31 percent (CI=21-43 percent) of middle school students who smoke and 42 percent (CI=38-47 percent) of high school smokers answered a day or less.
- ~ About half of students in high school who smoke (49 percent, CI=44-55 percent) want to quit, and almost six of 10 middle school smokers want to quit (59 percent, CI=45-71).
- ~ Fifty percent of middle school (CI=43-58 percent) and 28 percent of high school students (CI=26-31 percent) were taught the dangers of tobacco use in class during this school year.
- ~ Over twice as many high school, 43 percent (CI=40-45 percent), as middle school students, 18 percent (CI=16-21 percent), were asked by a healthcare professional if they smoked.

Knowledge and Attitudes

- ~ Black students in middle school (26 percent, CI=21-32 percent) and Hispanic students in high school (29 percent, CI=23-36 percent) and middle school (26 percent, CI=17-38) were more likely than white students in high school (16 percent, CI=14-19 percent) and middle school (13 percent, CI=11-15 percent) to think that young people who smoke have more friends.
- ~ Significantly more white students than Hispanic students in high school thought that young people risk harming themselves if they smoke from one to five cigarettes per day.
- ~ More males (14 percent, CI=12-16 percent) than females (9 percent, CI=7-11 percent) in high school believed that it is safe to smoke for only a year or two if they eventually quit.
- ~ One-fourth of high school students and three out of 10 middle school students believed that light (low tar) cigarettes are somewhat less risky than regular (full flavor) ones.

Mass Media

- ~ Fewer Hispanic high schools students (59 percent, CI=52-66 percent) had seen or heard commercials on TV, internet or radio about the dangers of tobacco, compared to white students (70 percent, CI=68-73 percent).
- ~ About four out of 10 middle and high school students who use tobacco see ads for tobacco products on the internet.

Secondhand Smoke

- ~ Black students in middle school (83 percent, CI=77-88 percent) were less likely than white middle school students (93 percent, CI= 92-94 percent) to think that second-hand smoke is harmful to them.
- ~ Hispanic high school students (88 percent, CI=82-92) were less likely than white students (94 percent, CI=93-96 percent) to think that secondhand smoke is harmful to them.
- ~ Almost seven out of eight middle school students and more than three-quarters of high school students think smoking should never be allowed indoors where people work.