

Executive Summary

The effects of tobacco are well known and wide-ranging. Tobacco is an addictive drug which hurts the people using it, as well as their families, friends and acquaintances. Its cost is felt financially, emotionally and physically. Laws have been enacted to prevent youth from using tobacco, but still many youth 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
- Identify and eliminate tobacco-related disparities

One of the key components to these best practices is surveillance and evaluation, which gives 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 2008/09 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 provides the results of this survey. It shows that, while significant strides have been made toward CDC's goals for 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 2006/07. Below are highlights from the report.

PREVALENCE

- ~ In the 2008/09 school year, 4 percent of middle school students (95 percent CI= 3-6 percent) smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days, which is unchanged since 2006/07.
- ~ Eighteen percent of high school students (CI=16-21) in the school year 2008/09 smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days, which is the same as the 2006/07 rate of 18 percent (CI=15-20).
- ~ There were no significant differences in the rates of smoking between males and females in either high school or middle school.
- ~ Among middle school students, 3 percent (CI=2-5) had used smokeless tobacco in the past 30 days. Among high school students, 9 percent (CI=7-11) did so.

ACCESS

- ~ Among high school students who purchased cigarettes in the past 30 days, approximately 47 percent (CI=41-53) were asked for proof of age.
- ~ Among high school students who purchased cigarettes in the past 30 days, approximately 36 percent (CI=28-46) were denied the sale because of their age.

CESSATION

- ~ When asked how long they can go before feeling the need for a cigarette, 32 percent (CI=24-42) of middle school students who smoke and 46 percent (CI=40-53) of high school smokers answered “a day or less”.
- ~ About half of students who smoke in both high school (49 percent, CI=43-54) and middle school (51 percent, CI=38-64) want to quit.
- ~ Fifty percent of middle school (CI=45-55) and 35 percent of high school students (CI=32-38) were taught the dangers of tobacco use in class during the past year.
- ~ Over twice as many high school, 46 percent (CI=44-49), as middle school students, 22 percent (CI=19-24), were asked by a health care professional if they smoked.

KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

- ~ Black students in high school (32 percent, CI=26-38) and middle school (26 percent, CI=20-33 percent) and Hispanic students in high school (33 percent, CI=25-42) were more likely than white students in high school (17 percent, CI=14-19) or middle school (14 percent, CI=12-16) to think that young people who smoke have more friends.
- ~ Significantly more white than black students in both middle and high schools thought that young people risk harming themselves if they smoke from one to five cigarettes per day.
- ~ Twice as many males (19 percent, CI=17-22) as females (9 percent, CI=7-11) in high school believed that it was safe to smoke for only a year or two, if they eventually quit.
- ~ Nearly one-third of both high school and middle school students believed that light (low tar) cigarettes are somewhat less risky than regular (full flavor) cigarettes.

MASS MEDIA

- ~ Fewer high schools students had seen or heard commercials on TV, internet or radio about the dangers of tobacco in 2008/09 (70 percent, CI=67-73), compared with 2006/07 (78 percent, CI=75-80).

SECONDHAND SMOKE

- ~ Black and Hispanic students in middle school (87 percent, CI=81-92, and 88 percent, CI= 82-92, respectively) were less likely than white students (95 percent, CI= 93-97) to think that smoke from other peoples' cigarettes could cause them harm.
- ~ Over 80 percent of middle school students and three-quarters of high school students thought smoking should never be allowed indoors where people work.
- ~ More high school students (43 percent, CI=40-47) in 2008/09 than in 2006/07 (26 percent, CI=22-30) had a least one of their four closest friends who smoked.