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Changing Adolescent Smoking Prevalence

Where It Is and Why

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service
National Institutes of Health
National Cancer Institute



MONOGRAPH



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Strategies to Control Tobacco Use in the United States: a blueprint for public health action in the 1990's. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 1. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. NIH Publication No. 92-3316, December 1991.

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Health Effects of Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke. The Report of the California Environmental Protection Agency. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 10. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute. NIH Publication No. 99-4645, August 1999.

State and Local Legislative Action to Reduce Tobacco Use. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 11. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, NIH Publication No. 00-4804, August 2000.

Population Based Smoking Cessation: Proceedings of a Conference on What Works to Influence Cessation in the General Population. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 12. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, NIH Publication No. 00-4892, November 2000.

Preface

This monograph is the first major update of adolescent smoking behavior since the groundbreaking reports of the Surgeon General and the Institute of Medicine in 1994. The authors of this National Cancer Institute (NCI) Monograph report some progress toward reducing tobacco use among adolescents but also highlight areas in which more efforts need to be made.

Several chapters examine trends in adolescent smoking behavior, among all adolescents nationally, different racial/ethnic groups, and among adolescents residing in specific States. Other chapters examine these trends using different national surveys as data sources and different analytical methods. Finally, the remaining chapters present data on macro-level policies and factors that influence the initiation and maintenance of smoking behavior among adolescents.

National survey data are used in chapters 3, 4, 8, and 9 to examine trends in adolescent smoking. Chapter 8, "Changes in Adolescent Smoking Behaviors in Sequential Birth Cohorts," is the most extensive, reviewing data from 5-year birth cohorts from 1926-1930 to 1981-1985. The data show that initiation rates have declined over time at all ages for males while female cohorts showed little indication of a decline in initiation for ages under 16 years and an increasing initiation rate for ages 16 and older. Chapter 9, "Pattern of Adolescent Initiation Rates over Time: National and California Data," compares cross-sectional data from national surveys with data from the State of California shortly after the passage of Proposition 99. It was this law that provided tobacco control groups with funding to launch an aggressive anti-smoking campaign. Following the enactment of Proposition 99, adolescent smoking showed a significant decrease in California compared with the national experience during this time, primarily among adolescent males.

Chapters 6, 7, and 9 report results from statewide projects in three of the States at the forefront of tobacco control in this country. Chapter 6, "Changing Adolescent Smoking Prevalence: Impact of Advertising Intervention," describes progress in Massachusetts. Chapter 7, "Predictors of Tobacco Use among Adolescents in Florida, 1998-1999," examines data from Florida and includes a study of the predictors of tobacco use among adolescents in that state. As noted above, Chapter 9, "Pattern of Adolescent Initiation Rates over Time: National and California Data," analyzes adolescent smoking over the period 1990-1996, the period following the enactment of Proposition 99, which was marked by a large increase in tobacco control activity in California.

While several of the chapters present data on various racial/ethnic groups, Chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17 focus exclusively on describing and explaining smoking behavior of African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents. Chapter 14, "African American Teen Cigarette Smoking: A Review," delineates the protective factors that may contribute to substantially lower prevalence rates among African American adolescents and risks factors that may contribute to increases in smoking that began in the early 1990's. Little is known on how protective and risk factors explain the "late onset" of smoking and transition to higher smoking rates among African American adults. Data are limited and do not often distinguish smoking rates among subgroups of people of African heritage.

Chapter 15, "Understanding Tobacco-Use Research among Hispanic/Latino Adolescents: A Sociocultural Perspective," suggests that explaining prevalence rates among Hispanic/Latino adolescents requires an understanding of the complex interfacing of changing demographics, heterogeneity among subgroups, sociodemographics, culture, language capabilities and preferences, role of acculturation, immigrant status, gender, social networks, and tobacco advertising and promotion. Prevalence rates are increasing although they are still lower than for Whites and American Native Indians.

Chapter 16, "Asian American and Pacific Islander Adolescent Cigarette Smoking: A Review," reviews factors associated with smoking, but strongly suggests that national data often mask the differences in tobacco use among American Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic subgroups. Small sample sizes in surveillance studies and lack of understanding on factors associated with tobacco use among subgroups often limit the generalizability of the results. Aggregate data from the California Youth Tobacco Survey document Asian youth susceptibility to smoking and dramatic increases in smoking rates from 1993-1996. Additional studies are needed to closely monitor prevalence rates and dissect factors influencing initiation among American Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic subgroups.

Chapter 17, "American Indian and Alaskan Native Teen Cigarette Smoking: A Review," examines the historical and cultural context of tobacco use among American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents. American Indians and Alaskan Native adolescents have consistently reported the highest percentage of cigarette smokers in the nation and these rates continue into adulthood. These rates vary by geographical region and among Native Indian groups. Reducing the harmful effects of tobacco in tandem with preserving Native culture calls for unique approaches to tobacco control among Native Indian adolescents.

While there are either limited aggregate data or subgroup data within African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents, these chapters offer explanations for factors that influence smoking initiation. It has long been recognized that a single tobacco control initiative is not equally successful

in all geographical areas or groups of different ethnic, educational, or economic backgrounds. These chapters each contribute to an understanding of the complexity and subtleties of tobacco control in this country.

This Monograph examines some of the macro-level influences of smoking behavior among adolescents. Two chapters address the effect of the media. Media influences are important and relevant for many reasons, including the enormous budget the tobacco industry devotes to advertising cigarettes, and that a large portion of this advertising is directed at young people. Chapter 10, "Changing Adolescent Smoking Prevalence: Impact of Advertising Intervention," examines this impact and addresses the use of advertising to deliver tobacco prevention messages. Chapter 13, "The Role of Tobacco Advertising and Promotion in Smoking Initiation," reports on the possible causal relationship between tobacco marketing and youth smoking initiation. Additional chapters analyze the impact of other macro-level factors. Chapter 12, "The Impact of Price on Youth Tobacco Use," examines how the price of cigarettes may influence youth smoking. Data suggests that youth are more responsive to cigarette price increases than are young adults and adults. Youth with greater disposable income smoke more than those with fewer resources and price sensitivities may differ for population subgroups. Little is still known about the impact of large price increases on cigarette demand and the black market in tobacco products and the long-term impact of price changes on addictive behaviors over time.

The results presented in Chapter 11, "Has Youth Access to Tobacco Changed over the Past Decade?" are not encouraging. Youth access to cigarettes has not changed in the recent past and youth often obtain cigarettes from a variety of noncommercial and commercial resources. Although many states and communities have laws prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to minors, these laws are not always fully enforced. Curtailing illegal sales may reduce rates, but high compliance rates are necessary in order to see any effect since compliance rates may underestimate the commercial availability of cigarettes to minors.

In summary, while this Monograph documents some successes in the reduction of youth smoking initiation in some States and localities, there remains a need for an ongoing and exhaustive search for solutions, followed by committed and successful application to enable the country to reach its goals in the area of adolescent smoking.

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