

# SMOKING AND YOUTH



**This fact sheet is for public health officials and others who are interested in information on smoking and other tobacco use by youth. Smoking is dangerous to the health of both young people and older people who have been smoking longer. The chemicals from cigarette smoke damage the human body regardless of age.**

Nearly all tobacco use begins during youth and progresses during young adulthood. More than 3,200 children age 18 or younger smoke their first cigarette every day. Nearly 9 out of 10 smokers start before the age of 18 and almost all start smoking by age 26. Every adult who dies early because of smoking is replaced by two new young smokers. If smoking continues at current rates, 5.6 million—or 1 out of every 13—of today's children will ultimately die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.

## HEALTH EFFECTS

Smoking by youth and young adults can cause serious and potentially deadly health issues immediately and into adulthood. Young people who smoke are in danger of:

- addiction to nicotine;
- reduced lung growth; and
- reduced lung function;
- early cardiovascular damage.

Exposure to nicotine can have lasting effects on adolescent brain development. Cigarette smoking also causes children and teens to be short of breath and to have less stamina, both of which can affect athletic performance and other physically active pursuits.

## INDUSTRY MARKETING

Images that make smoking seem attractive and appealing are everywhere—in the movies and on TV, in video games, on the Internet, and in advertising at retail stores. Cigarette advertising and marketing cause youth and young adults to start smoking; nicotine addiction keeps them smoking into adulthood.

Although direct marketing to children is now prohibited, the tobacco industry is still developing, packaging, and advertising their products in ways that appeal to children. They promote new tobacco products such as:

- snus, a dry snuff in a small tea bag-like pouch that enables kids to consume tobacco products at school or in other tobacco-free environments;
- dissolvable tobacco in sticks, lozenges, and strips; and
- fruit and candy flavored smokeless and dissolvable tobacco products.

Except for menthol, cigarettes can no longer contain flavoring that appeals to children; however, tobacco companies can still include fruit and candy flavors in cigarette-sized cigars. In fact, as many high school boys now smoke cigars as smoke cigarettes. It is important to note that cigars that are small, cheap, flavored, and shaped and sized like cigarettes contain the same deadly poisons as cigarettes and are just as addictive.

## ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES

Many tobacco companies now produce and sell electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) such as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), vape pens, and e-hookahs. These devices deliver nicotine through an aerosol that is inhaled into the lungs the same way cigarette smoke is. So far, there are no studies on the health effects of long-term use of e-cigarettes and other ENDS, or whether use of ENDS leads to cigarette smoking by youth. However, nicotine is known to be addictive, toxic to developing fetuses, and harmful to adolescent brain development, so no youth should use e-cigarettes or any other tobacco product. Although cigarettes can no longer be advertised on TV, radio, billboards, or in magazines that appeal to youth, ENDS can be advertised anywhere.

## SECONDHAND SMOKE EXPOSURE

More than 400,000 babies born in the United States every year are exposed to chemicals in cigarette smoke before birth because their mothers smoke. In the last 50 years, 100,000 babies have died from smoking-related prematurity, low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), or other conditions caused by exposure to chemicals in secondhand smoke during infancy or before they were born.

Today, about half of all children between ages 3 and 18 years in this country are exposed to cigarette smoke regularly, either at home or in places such as restaurants that still allow smoking. Compared to children who are not exposed, children exposed to secondhand smoke:

- have more ear infections;
- have more respiratory infections;
- have more asthma attacks; and
- miss more days of school.



## PREVENTION AND CESSATION

No matter what age a person is, smoking is dangerous to health and can be hard to give up. Nicotine addiction is very powerful and happens quickly. It's easier to avoid starting to use tobacco in the first place than it is to quit later on. Encourage parents to talk to their kids about reasons to avoid tobacco use, and to protect their children from secondhand smoke exposure. A free brochure to help parents keep their children safe from the dangers of smoking is available at [surgeongeneral.gov](http://surgeongeneral.gov) and at [cdc.gov/tobacco](http://cdc.gov/tobacco).

THAT'S EQUAL TO  
**1 CHILD**  
OUT OF  
**EVERY 13**  
ALIVE IN THE U.S. TODAY

—OR—

**2** OF  
THE **27**  
CHILDREN  
IN THE AVERAGE  
**3RD GRADE**  
**CLASSROOM**



**RESOURCES  
FOR  
QUITTING**

- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.
- [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)
- [www.cdc.gov/tips](http://www.cdc.gov/tips)

Most people find a combination of resources works best. Many smokers do not quit on their first attempt. Many need several tries to successfully quit. But the benefits are well worth it. Keep trying.



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
Office on Smoking  
and Health