

TOBACCO

TEENAGERS AND SMOKING



Australian Government
Department of Health

WHAT ARE THE SMOKING RATES AMONGST TEENAGERS?

The latest research shows that in 2011 only four in every one hundred (4%) Australian school students had smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lives.¹ One per cent of 12-year-olds and 15% of 17-year-olds had smoked in the previous week.¹

Smoking rates amongst school students have fallen greatly since the 1980s.¹ Between 1984 and 2011 the proportion of school students (aged 12–15 years) who had smoked in the last week fell from 20% to just 4%.¹ Over the same period, smoking in the past week by teenagers aged 16–17 fell from 30% to 13%.¹

The reasons for these falls are not entirely clear, however it is notable that the falls began after the start of the National Tobacco Campaign, which graphically depicted the harms of smoking. Other tobacco control policies and education programs have also played a role in their own right and as part of a comprehensive approach.

Australia is a world leader in public health measures which aim to reduce smoking. It also has one of the lowest smoking rates in the world.² In 2010, 15.1% of people in Australia aged 14 years or older were daily smokers, a reduction from 16.6% in 2007.⁴ Smoking rates are higher amongst some particular groups, including young people who don't do so well at school³ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.⁴

Despite the large reduction in smoking, tobacco use is still common in Australia compared to the levels of use of many illegal drugs.⁴ It is estimated that in 2011, 102,000 school students had smoked in the past week.¹

SMOKING AND PREGNANCY

Smoking rates are much higher amongst teenage mothers than amongst mothers generally.⁵ Amongst teenage mothers, 37% reported smoking in 2010, compared to 14% of mothers of all ages.⁵

Smoking during pregnancy is the most common cause of preventable pregnancy issues,⁵ and is linked with premature birth, death of babies around the time of birth, or babies who are born smaller than the average healthy birth weight.⁵

Smoking in pregnancy and secondhand (passive) smoking have been identified as one of the causes of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).^{6,7} Recent research has indicated that SIDS is at least twice as likely to occur among infants whose mothers smoked during pregnancy than among infants of women who did not smoke.⁸

A recent review of research has also linked smoking in pregnancy to higher rates of birth defects such as facial defects and cleft palate, missing toes and fingers, and missing limbs.⁹

The earlier a woman quits in pregnancy, the better, although quitting smoking before pregnancy is better still.¹⁰

For more information about smoking in pregnancy go to: www.quitnow.gov.au/internet/quitnow/publishing.nsf/Content/pregnancy-and-quitting. Please also see factsheet 'Alcohol, tobacco and other drug use in pregnancy', available at: www.comorbidity.edu.au/cre-resources/public

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SECONDHAND SMOKE?

Secondhand (passive) smoking is where people near a smoker breathe in the smoke from the cigarette also. This can cause disease — including lung cancer and heart disease — and premature death.⁷ There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.⁷ Immediate inflammation and adverse cardiovascular effects can be detected inside the body in response to exposure to secondhand smoke.⁷ It is particularly harmful for children, who are more likely to experience ear problems, severe asthma, and respiratory infections.⁷

DO CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS SMOKE IN THE SAME WAY AS ADULTS?

Children and teenagers usually smoke far fewer cigarettes each day and week than adults.¹¹ For example, 83% of adult smokers reported smoking each day in a recent national survey.⁴ But amongst school students who reported smoking in the past week, only 4% of 12-year-olds and 30% of 17-year-old school smokers smoked each day.¹ As young people move through their teens and into adulthood the intensity of smoking increases for those who continue to smoke.^{1, 11}

However, even at apparently low levels of smoking, addiction to cigarettes can develop quickly in young people.⁶





FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are many places you can find out more information about tobacco and smoking, including health information and advice to quit. These include:

Quitline

Telephone service for smokers who want to quit **13 7848 (13 Quit)**

www.quitnow.gov.au

Provides information about smoking and quitting, including a downloadable quit phone app My QuitBuddy

www.yourhealth.gov.au

Commonwealth government website with information about tobacco plain packaging and health warnings

www.oxygen.org.au

Website for young people with information about smoking, tobacco and the tobacco industry

www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au

An encyclopaedia of just about anything you ever wanted to know about smoking and ways to control it

INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The United States Office of the Surgeon General publishes two informative booklets:

Health effects of smoking

www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/tobaccosmoke/index.html

Preventing smoking amongst young people

www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2012/consumer_booklet/pdfs/consumer.pdf

Some state and territory based websites with information about smoking and quitting are listed below.

State/Territory	Website
New South Wales (I Can Quit)	www.icanquit.org.au
Queensland (QLD Health)	www.health.qld.gov.au/atod/prevention/quitline.asp
Victoria (Quit Victoria)	www.quit.org.au
Western Australia (Cancer Council)	www.cancerwa.asn.au
Australian Capital Territory (Cancer Council)	www.actcancer.org
Northern Territory (NT Health)	www.health.nt.gov.au/Alcohol_and_Other_Drugs/Tobacco/Quitline
Tasmania (Quit TAS)	www.quittas.org.au
South Australia (Quit SA)	www.quitsa.org.au

Kids Helpline

Free, private and confidential telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5–25 years.

Tel 1800 55 1800

Lifeline

A 24 hour crisis help line. **Tel 13 11 14**. Also provides one-on-one crisis support online chat.

www.lifeline.org.au/Find-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat

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