

- Smoking prevalence
- Factors influencing children
- Smoking and children's health
- Addiction
- Smoking Prevention
- Children, smoking and the law

## Young People and Smoking

[www.ash.org.uk](http://www.ash.org.uk)

[enquiries@ash.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ash.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7739 5902

### Smoking Prevalence

It is estimated that each year in England around 340,000 children under the age of 16 who have never smoked before try smoking cigarettes.<sup>1</sup> Every year, around 200,000 children and young people start smoking regularly.<sup>2</sup> Of these 67% start before the age of 18 and 84% by age 19.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of children who have ever smoked continues to decline. In 2010, 27% of 11-15 year olds had smoked at least once, compared with more than half (53%) in 1982 when the survey began.<sup>4</sup>

The annual Government survey of smoking among secondary school pupils defines regular smoking as smoking at least one cigarette a week. However, in 2010 pupils classified as regular smokers smoked a mean (average) of 38.3 cigarettes a week, approximately six a day. Occasional smokers smoked on average 5.2 cigarettes a week. These averages have remained at similar levels since 2004.<sup>4</sup>

As in previous years, girls are more likely than boys to have ever smoked and to be regular smokers. The prevalence of regular smoking increases with age, from less than 0.5% of 11 year olds to 15% of 15-year olds.<sup>4</sup>

#### Percentage of regular smokers aged 11-15 by sex: 1982 – 2010, England

Years	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2008	2009	2010
<b>Boys</b>	11	7	9	10	9	9	7	5	5	4
<b>Girls</b>	11	12	11	13	12	11	10	8	7	6
<b>Total</b>	11	10	10	12	11	10	9	6	6	5

**Note:** ONS estimates that in 2010 around 150,000 children aged 11-15 were regular smokers, 30,000 fewer than in 2009.

The decline in smoking has been most marked among older pupils. The proportion of 14 year olds who smoked regularly fell from 13% in 2006 to 6% in 2010; among 15 year olds, 12% smoked regularly in 2010, compared with 20% in 2006.<sup>4</sup>

## Percentage of 15 year old regular smokers, England <sup>4</sup>

Years	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2008	2009	2010
<b>Boys</b>	24	18	25	26	19	20	16	11	14	10
<b>Girls</b>	25	27	25	30	29	26	24	17	16	14
<b>Total</b>	25	22	25	28	24	23	20	14	15	12

### What factors influence children to start smoking?

Smoking initiation is associated with a wide range of risk factors including: parental and sibling smoking, the ease of obtaining cigarettes, smoking by friends and peer group members, socio-economic status, exposure to tobacco marketing, and depictions of smoking in films, television and other media.<sup>5</sup>

Children who live with parents or siblings who smoke are up to 3 times more likely to become smokers themselves than children of non-smoking households.<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that, each year, at least 23,000 young people in England and Wales start smoking by the age of 15 as a result of exposure to smoking in the home.<sup>5</sup>

### Smoking, alcohol and drug use

There is a strong association between smoking and other substance use. The 2010 secondary school survey found that pupils who had taken drugs at least once in the previous year had more than 11 times the odds of being regular smokers compared with pupils who had never taken drugs. Similarly there is a strong association between smoking and alcohol consumption, with the odds of being a regular smoker increasing with the number of units drunk in the previous week.<sup>4</sup>

### Other factors associated with smoking

Young people who played truant from school had twice the odds of being regular smokers while those who had been excluded from school at least once were almost three times more likely to smoke regularly compared to those who had never been excluded.<sup>4</sup>

### Attitudes to smoking

The proportion of pupils who think it is acceptable to try smoking has decreased since the question was first asked in 1999. Currently 35% believe it is acceptable to try smoking compared with more than half in 1999. Children are now more likely to have a realistic view of the number of people in their own age group who smoke. Half of pupils thought that only a few of their peers smoked, the most accurate answer, an increase from 45% in 1999.<sup>4</sup>

### Smoking and children's health

The younger the age of uptake of smoking, the greater the harm is likely to be because early uptake is associated with subsequent heavier smoking, higher levels of dependency, a lower chance of quitting, and higher mortality.<sup>5</sup>

Child and adolescent smoking causes serious risks to respiratory health both in the short and long term. Children who smoke are two to six times more susceptible to coughs and increased phlegm, wheeziness and shortness of breath than those who do not smoke.<sup>7</sup> Smoking impairs lung growth and initiates premature lung function decline which may lead to an increased risk of chronic obstructive lung disease later in life. The earlier children become regular smokers and persist in the habit as adults, the greater the risk of developing lung cancer or heart disease.<sup>8</sup>

Children are also more susceptible to the effects of passive smoking. Parental smoking is the main determinant of exposure in non-smoking children. Although

levels of exposure in the home have declined in the UK in recent years, children living in the poorest households have the highest levels of exposure as measured by cotinine, a marker for nicotine.<sup>9</sup>

Bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma and sudden infant death syndrome (cot death) are significantly more common in infants and children who have one or two smoking parents. For more information see the ASH Research Report: [Passive smoking: the impact on children](#), ASH Factsheets: [Smoking in the Home](#), and [Smoking in cars](#) (pdfs).

## Addiction

Children who experiment with cigarettes can quickly become addicted to the nicotine in tobacco. Children may show signs of addiction within four weeks of starting to smoke and before they commence daily smoking.<sup>10</sup> One US study found that smoking just one cigarette in early childhood doubled the chance of a teenager becoming a regular smoker by the age of 17<sup>11</sup> and a London study suggests that smoking a single cigarette is a risk indicator for children to become regular smokers up to three years later.<sup>12</sup> In the 2010 survey of school-children in England, 67% of regular smokers reported that they would find it difficult not to smoke for a week while 73% thought they would find it difficult to give up altogether.<sup>4</sup> During periods of abstinence, young people experience withdrawal symptoms similar to the kind experienced by adult smokers.<sup>13</sup>

## Smoking prevention

Research suggests that knowledge about smoking is a necessary component of anti-smoking campaigns but by itself does not affect smoking rates. It may, however, result in a postponement of initiation.<sup>14</sup> High prices can deter children from smoking, since young people do not possess a large disposable income: studies suggest young people may be up to three to four times more price sensitive than adults.<sup>15</sup> In Canada, when cigarette prices were raised dramatically in the 1980s and the early 1990s youth consumption of tobacco plummeted by 60%.<sup>16</sup> An American study has shown that while price does not appear to affect initial experimentation of smoking, it is an important tool in reducing youth smoking once the habit has become established.<sup>17</sup> The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued guidance on school-based interventions to prevent the uptake of smoking among children.<sup>18</sup>

## Children, smoking and the law

On 1 October 2007 the legal age for the purchase of tobacco in England and Wales was raised from 16 to 18. The amendment was designed to make it more difficult for teenagers to obtain cigarettes, since, despite the law, children still succeed in buying tobacco from shops and vending machines. In 2008, the first time data were collected after the change in the law, 39% of pupils who smoked said they found it difficult to buy cigarettes from shops, an increase of 15% from 24% in 2006.<sup>19</sup> There has also been a drop in the proportion of regular smokers who usually buy their cigarettes from a shop: from 78% in 2006 to 58% in 2010.<sup>4</sup> The 2010 survey also found that 8% of 11-15 year old regular smokers reported that vending machines were their usual source of cigarettes, compared to 17% in 2006.

The sale of cigarettes from vending machines will be prohibited in England from October 2011. A ban on the display of tobacco products in retail outlets will be introduced in two stages: from April 2012 in large shops and in April 2015 in small shops.<sup>20</sup>

During 2009 there were 216 prosecutions in England and Wales for underage

tobacco sales, with 175 defendants being found guilty.<sup>21</sup> An amendment to the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act includes banning orders for retailers who who persistently sell tobacco to persons under the age of 18. These measures came into force in April 2009.

Legislation alone is not sufficient to prevent tobacco sales to minors. Both enforcement and community policies may improve compliance by retailers but the impact on underage smoking prevalence using these approaches alone may still be small.<sup>22</sup> Successful efforts to limit underage access to tobacco require a combination of approaches that tackle the problem comprehensively.

## References

- 1 [Impact Assessments for the Health Bill](#). Department of Health, January 2009 page 18 para 54
- 2 [A Smokefree Future. A comprehensive tobacco control strategy for England](#). HM Government, 2010. (p10)
- 3 Robinson S & Bugler C. [Smoking and drinking among adults, 2008](#). General Lifestyle Survey 2008. ONS, 2010. (pdf)
- 4 [Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2010](#). The Information Centre for Health and Social Care, 2011
- 5 [Passive smoking and children](#). Royal College of Physicians, London, 2010 (pdf)
- 6 Leonardi-Bee J, Jere ML, Britton J. Exposure to parental and sibling smoking and the risk of smoking uptake in childhood and adolescence: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Thorax* 15 Feb 2011 doi:10.1136/thx.2010.153379
- 7 Smoking and the Young. Royal College of Physicians, 1992.
- 8 BMA Board of Science. [Breaking the cycle of children's exposure to tobacco smoke](#). British Medical Association, London, 2007
- 9 Going smoke-free. The medical case for clean air in the home, at work and in public places. A report on passive smoking by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the Royal College of Physicians. London, Royal College of Physicians, 2005
- 10 Di Franza JR et al. [Initial symptoms of nicotine addiction in adolescents](#). *Tobacco Control* 2000; 9: 313-319
- 11 Jackson, C & Dickinson, D. [Cigarette consumption during childhood and persistence of smoking through adolescence](#). *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2004;158: 1050-1056
- 12 Fidler, JA et al [Vulnerability to smoking after trying a single cigarette can lie dormant for three years or more](#). *Tobacco control* 2006; 15: 205-209
- 13 McNeill AD et al. [Cigarette withdrawal symptoms in adolescent smokers](#). *Psychopharmacology* 1986; 90: 533 - 536
- 14 Reid D. et. al. [Reducing the prevalence of smoking in youth in Western countries: an international review](#). *Tobacco Control* 1995; 4 (3): 266 - 277 (pdf)
- 15 Hopkins, D et al [Reviews of evidence regarding interventions to reduce tobacco use and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke](#). *Am J Prev Med* 2001; 20: 16-66
- 16 Sweanor, D and Martial LR, The Smuggling of tobacco products: Lessons from Canada. (Non-Smokers Rights Association, 1994)
- 17 Emery, S. White, M and Pierce, J. [Does cigarette price influence adolescent experimentation?](#) *J Health Economics* 2001; 20: 261 - 270
- 18 [School-based interventions to prevent the uptake of smoking among children](#). NICE, March 2010 .
- 19 [Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2008](#). The Information Centre for Health and Social Care, 2009
- 20 [Health Act 2009](#).
- 21 Offences relating to the illegal sale of tobacco to underage persons - England and Wales, 2003 to 2009. Office for Criminal Justice Reform, 2011.
- 22 Lancaster T, Stead LF, [Interventions for preventing tobacco sales to minors](#). The Cochrane Library, Issue 4, 1999