

# Profile of adolescent smoking in Canada

## *Prevalence in Canada*

Health Canada's *Youth Smoking Survey* (16) found that 24% of females and 23% of males between the ages of 15 and 19 years are current smokers.

In a recent "Study on youth smoking" by Rootman (17), 47% of Ontario grade 7 and 9 students report having had "at least one puff of a cigarette". Forty per cent of these report that they had their first puff at 10 years of age or younger (17).

Eight per cent of grade 7 students in Ontario smoke, but the majority of them do not smoke on a daily basis. Twenty-eight per cent of grade 9 students in Ontario smoke.- 9% smoke daily and 19% smoke less than daily (17).

Of the young men age 15 to 19 years who smoke, 31% began to smoke before age 13 years and 85% before age 16 years. Of the young women age 15 to

19 years who smoke, 26% began before age 13 years and 83% before age 18 years (18).

## **Amount smoked**

The average number of cigarettes smoked daily by adolescent males and females is 12.9 and 9.9, respectively, for an overall average of 11.4 per day (19). For 21% of men and 20% of young women, their smoking increased between January and May 1994, after tobacco taxes were reduced significantly. For 28% of young men and 32% of young women, their smoking decreased between January and May 1994 (18).

## **Incidence of quitting**

Seventy-four per cent of young men and 68% of young women who currently smoke have tried quitting for at least a week (18).

## **Reasons for quitting**

Cost was the number one reason (27%) teens gave for quitting smoking (20).

Health Canada's survey on smoking data shows that smoking prevalence among 15-19-year-olds is as much as 2% higher in the five provinces that did not cut tobacco taxes than in the five provinces that did cut taxes (21).

Future health concerns were also cited by teens (23%) as a reason for quitting (22).

### **Readiness to quit smoking**

Fifty-five per cent of teen smokers are contemplating or preparing to quit. The survey was unable to differentiate between males and females. Interestingly, the 20 to 24 years age group is the most resistant to quitting, with 55% of each of male and female smokers not even contemplating quitting. These findings underline the urgency of preventing smoking among preteens and of encouraging cessation among those teens who have taken up smoking (23).

### **Awareness of health risks**

Over 90% of smokers age 15 to 19 years believe smoking is harmful to both the smoker and the non-smoker (24).

For both sexes, the 15 to 19 age group was most likely to believe that smoking is harmful (24).

The health problems most often cited, among each of the age groups, were lung cancer, heart disease, bronchitis and other respiratory disease. Virtually no one believed that smoking was risk-free (24). However, it is clear that the extent and magnitude of the health risks of tobacco use are not understood, or are denied, by youth.

### **Reasons for resuming smoking**

Among those teens who tried quitting, the principal reason for resuming smoking was "family or friends smoke" (29%) (32% of males, 27% of females [18]) (25).

Sixteen per cent of females also cited "to relax" as another reason for resuming smoking (25).

### **Perceptions of tobacco company-sponsored activities**

Generally, youth currently interpret advertising of tobacco company-sponsored events as advertising for tobacco products (ie, Player's Racing Ltd, du Maurier Ltd Jazz Festival) (17).

Generally, youth associate tobacco company sponsorship activities with images, activities and events that are appealing and desirable (17).

### **Youth perceptions of plain packaging**

Sixty-four per cent of Ontario grade 7 and 9 students like regular cigarette packaging better than plain packaging. Perceptions are that the plain package is "boring, uglier" and that "cool kids" would be more likely to smoke cigarettes from regular packages (17).

One-quarter of Ontario grade 7 and 9 students said young smokers would smoke less if cigarettes were in plain packages and 35% said young non-smokers would be less likely to start smoking if cigarettes were in plain packages (17).

## References

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### *Prevalence in Ontario*

The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey examines the use of alcohol and other drugs among Ontario students in Grades 7, 9, 11 and 13. In total, 3571 students from 25 school boards, 165 schools and 233 classes participated in the survey conducted in the spring of 1993. The participation rate of students was 77%. This study also compares these 1993 data with those from eight surveys conducted every second year since 1977, making it the longest systematic study of drug use among youth in Canada. Between 1979 and 1993, tobacco use declined from 34.7% to 23.8%.

### *Prevalence in Quebec*

Quebec is the province with the highest rate of smokers. In 1994, for the population aged 15 and over, 35% of Quebecers were smokers while Canada's rate was 30%. Since 1985, this gap has been slowly growing. We should also note that the smoking rate has decreased from 40% to 35% from 1985 to 1994.

Santé Québec study surveyed 2500 teens, between the ages of 15 and 19 (1992).

From 1991 to 1994 in Québec, the average smoking rate for teenagers went from 15% to 22% for boys and from 22% to 36% for girls. (Aubin J., Caouette L., Gratton J. L'usage de la cigarette au Québec, 1985-1994 : analyse d'enquêtes multiples, Santé Quebec 1996)

#### **Santé Québec (1992)**

The following study by the Montreal Catholic School Board (CECM, 1993) reflects Montreal youth's tobacco use. Over 11 000 students were surveyed (average age = 14.8).

For secondary students of the CECM, we learn that :

- 47% have experimented with smoking (immigrants smoke less: 36% vs 51%)
- 31% are presently smoking
- the highest smoking rate is in secondary III
- Average age to start smoking = 12.5 years old
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	Boys	Girls
Habitual smokers	23%	24%
Occasional smokers	7%	11%

Habitual smokers:	15-17 ans: 21%
	18-19 ans: 27%
	20-24 ans: 32%

- 12% start smoking before the age of 11 or after 14
- 57% of youth smokers live in smoking families
- 39% of secondary I students have permission to smoke at home
- 71% of secondary V students have permission to smoke at home
- 64% of young smokers pay their own cigarettes

### CECM (1993)

#### *Prevalence in BC*

During 1992, the McCreary Society, in conjunction with the provincial Health Units, conducted a health status and risk behaviour survey of grade 7 through 12 students enrolled in public and independent schools in B.C.. Students from 48 different school districts participated. This survey represents the largest and most comprehensive survey to date of the health status and health risks of B.C. youth. A questionnaire was administered to students in classroom settings. It contained 123 questions for which the students were asked to choose an answer from a list of pre-formulated options. Approximately 6.1% of the estimated 256,884 grade 7 to 12 students in the province actually participated in the survey. This amounts to 15,549 student participants or roughly 2,592 students per grade level. The overall response rate was 74%.

- ⇒ Among all students in BC, 23% of males and 28% of females report they currently smoke cigarettes either occasionally or regularly (everyday). The percentage increases considerably with grade level for both sexes.
- ⇒ The majority of students who have ever smoked indicated they first tried smoking cigarettes between the ages of 11 and 14 years (ie, 58% of males and 65% of females). Nonetheless, the figure also shows that experimentation with cigarettes under the age of 9 is clearly higher among males than females.
- ⇒ Overall, 50% of males and 59% of females smokers said they had tried to quit smoking cigarettes in the past six months. More females than males indicated they had tried to quit at every grade level, with the exception of grade 7 students.

	Boys	Girls
Habitual smokers	13%	18%
Occasional smokers	13%	18%

