

A Hard Habit to Break

FINDINGS ON TEEN SMOKING & TOBACCO USE

From the March 2010 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Arlington, Virginia

The choices that young people make today have a big impact on their health and well-being, now and in the future.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest links to their health.

This brochure looks at data on smoking and other forms of tobacco use from Arlington's March 2010 survey of middle and high school students.

WHY WORRY?

Cigarette smoking is a serious health issue for our youth because smoking is both harmful and extremely addictive. The health risks of cigarette smoking are serious, significant, and well-established (see box below.) Studies have found that nicotine addiction can begin in a matter of weeks.

The good news is that young people who don't smoke by the age of 18 are extremely unlikely to become smokers. However, this fact is well known to tobacco companies. Studies have found that 86 percent of kids who smoke prefer one of the three most heavily advertised brands. While laws prohibit tobacco companies from targeting youth, their advertising clearly has an impact on the behavior of youth.

WHO IS SMOKING?

Overall, 24 percent of youth who participated in the survey reported they had tried smoking at least once in their lifetime ("lifetime use"). Less than half of that group (9 percent of all youth) reported that they had smoked in the past 30 days ("current use").

Few students (3 percent) reported heavy smoking, defined as smoking a half pack a day or more. Similarly, only 4 percent of youth reported they had first tried smoking before age 13. The younger individuals are when they start smoking, the more likely they are to become addicted.

OTHER TOBACCO USE

Fewer *high school* youth reported using other forms of tobacco. Eleven percent reported current cigar use and two percent reported current use of some form of smokeless tobacco (chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip). Taken together, 14 percent of 10th grade and 25 percent of 12th grade students reported current use of some form of tobacco.

HEALTH RISKS OF SMOKING

- ✓ Increases risk of cancer (including cancer of the larynx, lungs, esophagus, pancreas, and bladder)
- ✓ Increases risk of heart disease, stroke, and emphysema.
- ✓ For women, increases risk of fertility problems, premature births and low birth weight infants.
- ✓ In the short term, leads to shortness of breath, burns, increased upper respiratory infections and decreased physical fitness and lung function.

TRENDS IN SMOKING

Smoking behavior among Arlington youth decreased significantly from 2004 to 2010. The percentage who reported that they had tried smoking fell from 35 percent in 2004 to 24 percent in 2010. Similarly, the percentage who reported that they currently smoke fell from 15 to 9 percent.

Declines in smoking have been especially dramatic for middle school youth. The percent of 6th graders who had tried smoking fell from 24 percent in 2001 to 5 percent in 2010. The percent of 8th graders who currently smoke fell from 15 percent in 2001 to 3 percent in 2010.

WHO'S AT RISK?

Smoking clearly increases with age: Only 1 percent of youth in 6th grade currently smoke compared to 20 percent of youth in 12th grade. In Arlington, boys were more likely than girls to report having tried *and* currently smoking. In the national YRBS, boys and girls were equally likely to report both lifetime and current smoking.

TRYING TO QUIT

Quitting smoking is notoriously difficult – according to experts, nicotine addiction can be as powerful as heroin or cocaine addiction. For this reason, most smokers require repeated attempts in order to successfully quit. About 40% of Arlington youth who reported that they currently smoke also reported that they had tried but failed to quit smoking in the past year. This percentage indicates the need to motivate more youth to quit smoking and to help them to succeed.

ESPECIALLY FOR PARENTS

Believe it or not, your opinions and ideas matter a lot to your kids. What parents think and say about smoking and the rules they enforce about tobacco use have a huge influence on whether a child becomes a regular user of tobacco products

Here are some suggestions for helping your child avoid smoking and other tobacco products:

1. Avoid tobacco yourself. If you smoke, try to quit - the sooner the better. Let them see how hard it is.
2. Make sure your child knows that most teens don't smoke –and for good reasons.
3. Help your kids to be media-savvy. Encourage them to think about the implicit messages in cigarette ads and challenge those messages!
4. Encourage your child to play sports or participate in other fitness activities that they enjoy. Make clear – especially for girls – that healthy eating and regular exercise are the keys to weight control.
5. Don't take experimentation lightly. Nicotine is highly addictive and an extremely hard habit to break.
6. Discuss ways to respond to peer pressure to smoke or use tobacco. Help your child practice using those responses.

TO LEARN MORE

To find out more about keeping youth tobacco-free, try these sites:

How Parents Can Protect Their Kids from Becoming Addicted Smokers (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids) www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0152.pdf

Useful Resources to Quit Smoking, (Centers for Disease Control, and Prevention) at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm

Talking to Your Child about Smoking and Smokeless Tobacco (Nemours Foundation) at <http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/smoking.html>

Child and Teen Tobacco Use (American Cancer Society) at www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_2X_Child_and_Teen_Tobacco_Use.asp?sitearea=PED



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HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2850 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington's public secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their child. Only one percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled out a questionnaire. Most of those who did not were absent from school.