

Native Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives

FACT SHEET



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Although there is no universally recognized definition for the term, Native American is widely recognized and may have the broadest definition. It means a person who is of a tribe or people indigenous to the United States. US Census data for the two subgroups of American Indian/Alaskan Native is used exclusively here.

*Many Native American tribes use tobacco for ceremonial, spiritual or religious purposes: this fact sheet addresses only personal consumption and abuse of commercial tobacco products and its related addiction and harm.

National Facts and Trends

ADULTS

- American Indians smoke at a rate of 32.4%. This is the highest percentage for any race/ethnicity group in the United States.¹
- In some communities the smoking rate of American Indians is 73% (tribal nation in north central states).²
- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death among American Indians and lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among American Indians. Tobacco use is a major risk factor for both diseases.³
- Smoking rates vary by region and state. Rates are highest in Alaska (45.1%) and the Northern Plains (44.2%) and lowest in the Southwest (17%).⁴ (There is no known regional smoking prevalence data on Eastern Indian tribes.)
- Since 1978, pervasiveness of cigarette smoking has diminished for African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Pacific-Islanders, Hispanic and white women of reproductive age (18-44 years), but unfortunately, not for American-Indian and Alaska-Native women. In 1994-1995, the percentage of smoking in American-Indian and Alaska-Native women of reproductive age was 44.3%, as opposed to white (29.4%), African-American (23.4%), Hispanic (16.4%) and Asian-American and Pacific-Islander (5.7%) women of reproductive age.³

NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH

- Although American Indians smoke at a high rate, it appears to decrease with age (18-34, 48% vs. 55 and up, 10.5%) and education (44.1% with less than high school vs. 33.5% with high school graduate).³
- Of high school students who go to Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) funded schools, 56.5% smoke.⁵ versus 22.9% of US high school students.⁶ (BIA funds 185 schools on 63 reservations in 23 states for a total of 8,500 students.³)
- The rate of smoking among Native American girls is virtually the same as for boys (26.% and 29.5% respectively).⁷
- Native American youth start smoking at the youngest age⁶ and reported frequent cigarette use (more than 20 cigarettes in the preceding 30 days) 24.4% Native American⁴ vs. 13.8% US youth.⁸

OTHER TOBACCO USE

- 5.4% of Native American adults vs. 2.9 % of the general US population use smokeless tobacco.⁹
- Pipe and cigar use has been cited as higher in 1987 and 1991 NHI; however, this survey did not distinguish between ceremonial and addictive daily pipe smoking.³
- 1 in 5 Native American youth living on reservations use smokeless tobacco⁵ vs. 1 in 12 US high school students.⁸

Maine Facts and Trends

- There are 7,582 American Indians/Alaska Natives in Maine.¹⁰ This is less than 1% (.5%) of the total population. Of the 7,582 American Indians in Maine, 43.9% smoke.¹¹
- Native Americans in Maine are younger than the general population, having a higher birth rate and shorter life expectancy.¹²
- Native Americans have lower per capita household incomes (\$21,519 vs. \$27,854), a higher rate of unemployment (14% vs. 6%) and fewer high school graduates.^{12*}
- Diabetes and its complications, addiction to tobacco, alcohol and other substances and obesity were the three problems consistently identified as top priorities.¹³
- There is no data available on Maine American Indian youth smoking rates.

*Statistics show that persons who have a lower income/live in poorer areas, are unemployed and/or do not graduate from high school have a higher risk of smoking.

The Story Behind the Facts: Why Is this Information Important

- In 2006 there were 4.5 million Native Americans/Alaska Natives in this country. This is 1.5% of the total population. This is the fourth largest minority group after Hispanics, Blacks and Asians.¹⁴
- Cigarette smoking has become one of the leading causes of death and disability for the Native American population.¹⁵
- Nationally 30% of American Indians/Alaskan Natives report lacking any health insurance. The data is similar for Maine.¹⁶
- Traditionally, Native Americans did not use tobacco on a daily basis and not just any member of the tribe could smoke, but tobacco has since become an abusive habit in which the traditional practices are not longer employed.¹⁵
- As sovereign nations, tribes were excluded from eligibility to receive any funds from the Master Settlement Agreement, leaving them to rely on dwindling, or in some cases nonexistent, state funding for tobacco control.¹⁷
- To build its image and credibility in the Native American community, the tobacco industry targets American Indians and Alaska Natives by funding cultural events such as powwows and rodeos.¹⁷
- Little is known about youth tobacco use in this population although national statistics indicate that it is very high among some sub groups within this group.

References:

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- ² Association of American Indian, "Cancer Resources, American Indian/Alaskan Native Cancer Statistics", http://www.aaip.org/indian_health/cancer.htm
- ³ US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "1998 Surgeon General's Report—Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups: American Indians and Alaska Native and Tobacco," http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_1998/sgr-min-nat.htm.
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- ⁶ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, "Native Americans & Tobacco Use", <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/Script/DisplayPressRelease.php?Display=1087>
- ⁷ Caraballo, R.S., Yee, S.L., Pechacek, T, et. al., 2006, Tobacco Use Among Racial and Ethnic Population Subgroups of Adolescents in the United States. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, April 2006, Vol. 3 No. 2. <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1563983>.
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- ⁹ US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Use of Smokeless Tobacco among Adults—United States, 1991" MMWR, 42(14), <http://cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm4214.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ US Census estimate, 2006
- ¹¹ CDC 2007 Maine Highlights Report (based on combined BRFSS 2005, 2006 with at least 50 participants).
- ¹² Kuehnert, M.S. July 14, 2003, "Health Status and Needs Assessment of Native Americans in Maine: Final Report", *Maine Department of Human Services*. <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/files/nar/nar2.doc>.
- ¹³ 2000 health needs assessment, Maine CDC, with significant help from directors and staff of Native American health centers.
- ¹⁴ US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/>.
- ¹⁵ Hodge, F.S. (2002). American Indian and Alaska Native teen cigarette smoking: A review. *National Cancer Institute: Changing Adolescent Smoking Prevalence*, Monograph 14, 255-261. http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/14/m14_17.pdf.
- ¹⁶ US Census Bureau News, August 29, 2006, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/007419.html.
- ¹⁷ American Lung Association, Fact Sheet, "American Indians and Alaska Natives and Tobacco", <http://www.ritobaccocontrolnet.com/nativeam.htm>.



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