

# African Americans and Tobacco

## FACT SHEET



### African Americans/Blacks

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“Black or African American” are terms used interchangeably in this fact sheet. The terms reflect those used in the 2000 U.S. Census and utilized by the CDC. They refer to people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who self identify as Black, African American or Negro alone, as well as those who identify, for example, as “Afro American”, “Nigerian” or “Haitian”. The statistics thus do not distinguish between “native born” blacks and recent immigrants—yet recent studies have indicated that there may be significant differences in smoking behavior between these groups.

### National Facts and Trends

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- Among African American/black adults, 21.5% are current smokers (slightly higher than the national rate of 20.9%).<sup>1</sup>
- African American adults now smoke at rates that are only slightly more than whites (21.9 vs. 21.5 respectively.) Those with low income and who fail to graduate from high school smoke at much higher rates (29.9 and 43.2 respectively).<sup>2</sup>
- African American men smoke more than African-American women (26.7% vs. 17.3%).<sup>2</sup>
- African American high school students smoke at lower rates than their white and Hispanic peers—11.6% vs. 23.2% (white) vs. 16.7% (Hispanic) students.<sup>3</sup> Middle school African American children smoke less than white children, but the difference is very modest.<sup>4</sup>
- Approximately three of every four African-American smokers prefer menthol cigarettes. Among whites, approximately a quarter of smokers prefer menthol cigarettes. Menthol may facilitate absorption of harmful cigarette smoke constituents.<sup>5</sup>
- 51.3% of African American children age five and under are exposed to second hand smoke in their home.<sup>5</sup>

### Maine Facts and Trends

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- There are no published Maine data available, although some advocates in Maine’s African American community believe smoking behaviors for blacks in Maine are similar to that of whites. These advocates also believe there is a need for culturally appropriate prevention and treatment services in order to eliminate racial disparities in health.
- Advocates argue that one determining factor for smoking among this population is an elevated social status associated with smoking. Advocates also reported that African immigrant men in Maine suffer from tobacco addiction in very large numbers.<sup>6</sup>
- A report on tobacco use among the eleven largest ethnic language groups in Portland found that Somali men had a “perceived” smoking rate exceeding 70%.
- No data is available concerning smoking among Maine’s black youth.

# The Story Behind the Facts: Why Is this Information Important

- Blacks smoke fewer cigarettes and start smoking later than whites but smoking related disease mortality is still significantly higher in Blacks.<sup>5</sup>
- Cigarette smoking is a major cause of disease and death in African Americans and they currently bear the greatest health burden. Differences in the magnitude of disease risk are directly related to differences in patterns of smoking.<sup>5</sup>
- 45,000 African Americans die from smoking related disease each year – the number one killer, killing more blacks than AIDS, homicide, diabetes and accidents combined.<sup>8</sup>
- Lung cancer kills more blacks than any other cancer. Blacks are more likely to develop and die from cancer than any other racial or ethnic group.<sup>9</sup>
- These higher rates of tobacco-caused disease may be the result, in part, of menthol cigarettes. 75% of Black adults smoke menthol cigarettes<sup>10</sup> and 80% of Black teens prefer Newport.<sup>11</sup>
- African American women have the highest rates of low birth weight and premature births. This may also be due, in part, to menthol cigarettes, which have higher carbon monoxide concentrations than nonmenthol brands.<sup>12</sup>

## References

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Cigarette Smoking Among Adults—United States, 2006", *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, Vol. 56 No. 44, November 9, 2007. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5644.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Tobacco Use Among Adults—United States, 2005", *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, Vol. 55 No. 42, October 27, 2006. [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm5542.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm5542.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States 2007", *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, Vol. 57 No. SS-4, June 6, 2008. [http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/pdf/yrbs07\\_mmwr.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/pdf/yrbs07_mmwr.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Tobacco Use, Access, and Exposure to Tobacco in Media Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2004", *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, Vol. 54 No. 12, April 25, 2005. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5412a1.htm>
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups", *A Report of the Surgeon General 1998*, [http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/sgr\\_1998/sgr-min-sgr2.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_1998/sgr-min-sgr2.htm)
- <sup>6</sup> From "An Initial Assessment of Tobacco Use and Tobacco Related Issues among Diverse Populations in Maine", prepared by MCSOH, funding from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 11/30/04.
- <sup>7</sup> Prepared by Kolawole A. Bankole, MD, Minority Health program Coordinator, Public Health Division, City of Portland, June 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office on Smoking and Health, Unpublished data, 1995.
- <sup>9</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), NCHS.
- <sup>10</sup> HHS, *Reducing the Health Consequences of Smoking: 25 years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 1989.
- <sup>11</sup> HHS, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Results from the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH: Detailed Tables <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/2k5nsduh/tabs/Sect7peTabs58to67.pdf>.
- <sup>12</sup> English P, et al., "Black-white differences in serum cotinine levels among pregnant women and subsequent effects on infant birthweight," *American Journal of Public Health*, 1994 September, 84(9): 1439-43.



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