

Young Adults and Tobacco

FACT SHEET



Young Adults

Young adults are usually considered as those ages 18–24; but smoking rates are sometimes reported on a 18–34 age group, particularly if the survey data sample is small. Young adults can be college students, workers, apartment dwellers, immigrants, gays and lesbians, mothers, and members of the military. Young adult smokers include a high proportion of light, casual, and social smokers, as well as brand switchers who are attractive targets for tobacco industry marketing.

National Facts and Trends

- The smoking rate (median) in the U.S. for ages 18–24 was 28.3% in 2006 and 26% in 2005.¹
- College and non-college young adults show differences in cigarette smoking. A striking difference in smoking rates has long existed between college-bound and non-college-bound high school seniors. In 2003, smoking a half pack or more per day was about three times as prevalent among the non-college-bound seniors (17.2% vs. 5.5%). One to four years past college age, those young adults not in college were also smoking at a dramatically higher rate than those who were in college, 20.1% vs. 7.6%. Clearly, the differences precede college attendance.²
- Smoking among non-college young adults aged 18–24 is more than twice as high as that among their college-educated peers (33% vs. 14%). This discrepancy is maintained across gender, race/ethnicity, income, occupation, and employment status.^{3,4}
- Among college students in the U.S., a peak in cigarette smoking was reached in 1999 at 31% and declined to 23% in 2003. Young adults 19–28 years old did not really begin to show a decline until after 2001 (30%) and another decline to 28% in 2003.²

Maine Facts and Trends

- Of young adults ages 18–24, 28.3% smoke.¹
- The majority of current smokers (59.4%) of young adults ages 18–24 have tried to quit smoking at least once in the past 12 months.⁵
- Among women less than 20 years old, 32.6% smoke during pregnancy.⁶
- Among those 20–24, 30.2% smoke during pregnancy.⁶
- All of the residential housing on Maine's (21) college campuses are smoke-free.⁷
- Among people ages 18–24, 88% strongly or somewhat believe that people should be protected from secondhand smoke, almost the same as the overall adult population at 90%.⁵
- Of those ages 18–24, 41% live with another smoker compared to 21% of the total population.⁵
- Maine's history of publicity around smoking by young adults has been confusing. Reports on this age group have not been consistent; they have used several age groupings to represent "young adults" as shown in the above bullets and the examples that follow:
 - Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), Nov. 8, 1996, had an article that listed Maine's 18–30 year olds as having the highest rate of smoking (32%) in the U.S., using 1995 BRFSS data.

- o MMWR, July 7, 2000, had an article that listed Maine's population ages 18–29 as third highest in the U.S. for smoking (33.7%), using a combination of 1996 and 1997 BRFSS data. This data showed males in Maine with the highest rate of smoking at 42.5%.
- o MMWR, September 28, 2007, showed Maine rates of smoking as fourth highest for ages 18–35: 30.2% compared to the U.S. median of 25.3%.

The Story Behind the Facts: Why This Information Is Important

- The major life transitions that often occur during young adulthood are seen by the tobacco industry as great opportunities to promote its products. Going off to college, entering the military, starting new jobs, moving away from home, dealing with low-paying jobs or unemployment, and struggling with relationships all can be very stressful situations.⁸
- "...the ten years following the teenage years is the period during which average daily consumption per smoker increases to the average adult level. Some people also try smoking for the first time at this age."⁸
- From the perspective of the tobacco industry, the young adult years are critical to the expansion of their markets and sales.⁸
- Social smoking is a distinct pattern of tobacco use that is common among college students and may represent a stage in the uptake of smoking.⁹
- Non-college young adults are a group in transition. Many still live with their families, are likely to be working at low wage jobs, and many have children or are pregnant.¹⁰
- Socializing with friends is still very important among young adults. They may like challenging authority, and they want to be cool.¹⁰
- Young adults tend to spend their time at bars, parties, friends' homes, work, the mall, or in their cars.¹¹
- The tobacco industry believes that the drug effects of nicotine are "most rewarding to the individual under stress." It is eager to offer its products as a quick way to calm nerves and relieve the tension brought on by stressful situations.¹²

References:

- ¹ BRFSS, 2005, 2006.
- ² National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Monitoring the Future, National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975–2003, Vol. II: College Students & Adults Ages 19–45, 2003. http://monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/vol11_2003.pdf.
- ³ Solberg, LI, SE Asche, R Boyle, M McCarty, and MJ Thoele. "Toward a Better Understanding of Smoking Cessation Among Young Adults." *AJPH* (August 2007) Vol. 97, No 8: 1421.
- ⁴ Green, M, K McCausland, H Xiao, J Duke, D Vallone, C Heatlon. "A Closer Look at Smoking Among Young Adults: Where Tobacco Control Should Focus its Attention." *AJPH* (August 2007) Vol. 97, No. 8: 1427.
- ⁵ Maine Adult Tobacco Survey, 2004.
- ⁶ Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), 2005.
- ⁷ American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, US Colleges and Universities with Smoke Free Air Polices, July 1, 2008, <http://www.no-smoke.org/pdf/smokefreecollegesuniversities.pdf>.
- ⁸ Ling PM, Glantz, SA. Why and how the tobacco industry sells cigarettes to young adults: Evidence from industry documents. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2002; 92(6):908-916, <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/reprint/92/6/908.pdf>.
- ⁹ Moran, S, Wechsler, H and Rigotti, N.A., Social Smoking Among US College Students, *Pediatrics* 2004;114:1028-1034, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/114/4/1028>.
- ¹⁰ NTP News, Fall 2004, Vermont's Campaign for Young Adults Not in College.
- ¹¹ Bader, P, HE Travis, and HA Skinner. "Knowledge Synthesis of Smoking cessation Among Employed and Unemployed Young Adults." *AJPH* (August 2007) Vol. 97, No. 8: 1434.
- ¹² Minnesota Dept. of Health, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Minnesota, Minnesota Partnership for Action Against Tobacco, University of Minnesota. "Patterns of Smoking Among Minnesota's Young Adults," 2004. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/tobacco/youngadult2003report.pdf>.



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