

Oklahoma Youth Tobacco Survey

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Oklahoma State Department of Health
Office of Tobacco Use Prevention

Preface

Every year, more than 6,000 Oklahomans die from tobacco-related causes. Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death, killing more Oklahomans than alcohol, auto accidents, AIDS, suicides, murders and illegal drugs combined. Related medical expenses and lost productivity cost Oklahomans more than \$1 billion every year, or an average of \$300 per person. More than 587,000 Oklahoma adults and more than 105,000 Oklahoma children currently use some form of tobacco. Of these, 75 percent of adults and 50 percent of children want to quit.

Tobacco addiction is a disease that begins in childhood. At least three of four adult smokers in Oklahoma became regular smokers as adolescents. One in six Oklahoma middle school students reported trying cigarettes for the first time before they were 11. Overall in Oklahoma, 46 percent of middle school students and 69 percent of high school students have tried cigarettes. Research indicates that nicotine dependence can develop in a young person within four weeks despite whether or not he or she is smoking daily or only smokes a few cigarettes each day. More than half of Oklahoma students who are current smokers have seriously tried to quit over the past 12 months. Approximately 90 percent believe that they could quit if they really wanted to. Among students who have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime, 30 percent have tried to quit at least three times.

The potential to begin smoking is high among Oklahoma youth that have not yet tried cigarettes. One in four middle school students and one in five high school students are likely to start smoking in the next year. One in six students who have never smoked say they would try a cigarette if a close friend offered it. Current smokers are more likely to believe smoking is not addictive and that smokers are “cooler” than and have more friends than students who do not smoke. Kids who smoke are more likely to associate with others that smoke. Sixty percent of current smokers have three or more close friends who also smoke, compared to 12 percent of non-smokers. Nearly half of all students live with someone who smokes.

More than half of the students who are currently smoking get their cigarettes from a social source, such as a friend or adult. Of those who bought cigarettes recently, gas stations and convenience stores were accessed more often than discount stores, grocery stores, drug stores, vending machines and restaurants combined. Among students who tried to purchase cigarettes at a store, four of five middle school students and three of five high school students were never asked for proof of age. Less than 10 percent of middle school students were refused a cigarette sale because of their age.

One in every three teen tobacco users will die prematurely from tobacco use. In a recent report released by the Oklahoma State Board of Health, tobacco was identified as the behavioral risk factor most negatively impacting the health of Oklahomans. The Board has recommended the immediate implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, evidence-based tobacco prevention and reduction program. Based on other states’ experiences, it is conservatively projected that such a program would decrease youth tobacco use across the state by a minimum of 25 percent within three years.

Purpose and Methodology

The Oklahoma Youth Tobacco Survey (OYTS) was conducted in the Spring of 1999 by the Oklahoma State Department of Health, in cooperation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and numerous partners from local health agencies and local school districts. This first-ever comprehensive survey of tobacco use, knowledge and attitudes among Oklahoma youth will provide important baseline data and will be used to guide youth tobacco use prevention programs.

The OYTS is a representative survey of all middle school and high school students in Oklahoma. The survey was administered to 2,169 middle school students (grades 6-8) in 47 schools, and 1,941 high school students (grades 9-12) in 48 high schools. These schools were located in 37 counties throughout Oklahoma. Both public and private schools were surveyed and the same questionnaire items and definitions were used for both the high school and the middle school surveys.

The OYTS used a two-stage sampling procedure to select schools and students to be surveyed. Schools were selected with probability proportional to enrollment. The second stage of sampling involved the random selection of second period classes within the sampled schools. All students in a selected class were eligible for participation. The participation rate for both middle school and high schools was 100 percent. Among middle school students selected in the sample, 84 percent were surveyed, and among high school students, 82 percent were surveyed. The data have been weighted to adjust for non-response at the school and student levels.

The OYTS consisted of 72 questions covering student use of various tobacco products including cigarettes, spit tobacco, spit tobacco and pipe tobacco. Issues addressed by the survey included prevalence of tobacco use, access to tobacco products, desire to quit, use of tobacco at schools, knowledge and attitudes, media/advertising awareness, exposure to environmental tobacco smoke and general student demographics. A majority of the questions presented in this report are stratified by school type (middle school and high school), school grade (6-12), gender and race/ethnicity (African American, Hispanic, Native American and White). Additionally, questions addressing knowledge and attitudes were stratified by whether the student was a current smoker or not.

For certain issues, stratification by certain student characteristics was not available. This is due to either the small number of students in certain subgroups or to low prevalence of a certain behavior overall. For example, African Americans represent less than 10 percent of the overall student population and the rate of current smoking among African Americans is relatively low compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Consequently, estimates for certain questions such as the number of cigarettes smoked per day, source of cigarettes, etc. are not available for current African American smokers. Similarly, approximately 2 percent of girls surveyed were considered to be current spit tobacco users. Further stratification of this group is not possible.

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Current Use of Any Tobacco Product	2
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Age First Tried a Cigarette	4
Cigarettes Smoked in Lifetime.....	5
Ever a Daily Smoker	6
Current Cigarette Smokers.....	7
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