



Tobacco and Cancer Fact Sheet

for Health Care Professionals



Tobacco and Cancer in the US

- Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of cancer occurrence and death in the US. About 30% of all cancer deaths are caused by smoking.¹
- Despite decades of declining smoking prevalence, smoking rates remain high among certain segments of the population, including:
 - Those who live in rural areas
 - People in lower socioeconomic groups
 - Certain racial or ethnic groups
 - Bisexual women and other members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community
 - People with disabilities
 - People with serious psychological distress
- Secondhand smoke will likely cause about 6,120 cases of lung cancer in 2025.¹

Cancer Risk

Cigarettes

Besides being the leading cause of lung cancer deaths in adults, cigarette smoking increases the risk of many other types of cancer such as oral cavity, nasal cavity, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, pancreas, cervix, kidney, bladder, ureter, stomach, colon and rectum, and liver, as well as acute myeloid leukemia. In addition, there is evidence that smoking may increase the risk of fatal prostate cancer and a rare type of ovarian cancer (mucinous).¹

Cigars

In 2024, cigars were the fourth most commonly used tobacco product among US middle and high school students.²

This is due in part to the availability of flavored products, appealing packaging, and targeted marketing.³

Cigars are often taxed at a lower rate than cigarettes, leading some people who smoke to switch from cigarettes to cigars.³ Regular cigar smoking is associated with an increased risk of cancers of the lung, oral cavity, larynx, and esophagus.¹

Secondhand smoke

Exposure to secondhand smoke (SHS) increases the risk of lung cancer. There is also research suggesting a possible link between SHS and cancers of the breast, nasal sinuses, larynx, and nasopharynx in adults. SHS may also increase the risk of certain childhood cancers, such as lymphoma, leukemia, and brain tumors.⁴

Smokeless tobacco

Oral or smokeless tobacco products can cause oral, esophageal, and pancreatic cancer, as well as precancerous lesions of the mouth. Smokeless tobacco is not a safe alternative to cigarettes.¹

E-cigarettes

While e-cigarettes (vaping devices) have not been directly linked to cancer, long-term health effects are not yet known. It is important to note that e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which can be highly addictive, and the aerosol from e-liquids used in these products can contain other harmful chemicals. In 2024, e-cigarettes were the most commonly used tobacco product among high school and middle school students. Using e-cigarettes may lead some people to begin using combustible tobacco products that have known cancer risks.^{1,4}

Risk Reduction

Avoiding or quitting tobacco can help to greatly lower a person's risk of certain cancers, along with several other chronic diseases. People who quit at any age are more likely to live longer than people who keep smoking.

Avoiding tobacco use

Prevention efforts aimed at children and young adults can lead to a decrease in many tobacco-related health problems.

Avoiding secondhand exposure

Comprehensive smoke-free laws that prohibit smoking in public places and create smoke-free environments are effective in:

- Reducing SHS exposure
- Modifying smoking behavior
- Reducing the risk of smoking-related disease.

Data also show that the home is the main location for exposure to secondhand smoke for children and adults. Adults should prohibit the use of tobacco products in their homes.⁶

Tobacco cessation

In 2023, 65% of people who ever smoked more than 100 cigarettes quit. This increased from 52% in 2009.⁶

Evidence-based cessation methods include nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), prescription medications (e.g., varenicline and bupropion), and counseling. All have been shown to double or triple the likelihood of successfully quitting long term. Tobacco cessation is most effective when pharmacologic and behavioral are combined.⁵

All US states have telephone-based quitlines. Additionally, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires coverage for cessation treatments for people in most private, and some public, health insurance plans. And, some state Medicaid programs have expanded coverage to include no-cost tobacco cessation services.⁶

References

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