

# Lighting Up

## TOBACCO USE AMONG BC YOUTH

Tobacco use is widely recognized as a leading cause of preventable disease, chronic disability and premature death. In Canada, over 20% of all deaths each year are caused by smoking-related cancers, cardio-vascular disease or respiratory diseases. Half of all long-term smokers will die prematurely as a result of smoking; a quarter will die in middle age, losing 20 to 25 years of life

Cigarette smoking among young people remains a serious health issue in BC. Results of the Adolescent Health Survey II (AHS II) show that smoking has not declined since the first survey in 1992. Forty-five percent of students aged 12-18<sup>1</sup> have tried smoking at least once, and 15% are current (daily or non-daily) cigarette smokers. About a quarter of students in 1992 and in 1998 said they had smoked cigarettes on one or more days in the past month.

### Gender And Age

Female students are somewhat more likely than males to be current smokers (17% vs.13%). Older students, aged 15 to 18 years, are much more likely than younger students to be current smokers (22% vs.7%). The proportion of students who are current cigarette smokers increases consistently from just 2% at age 12 to 31% by age 18.

This Fact Sheet provides a summary of information about tobacco use among BC youth. A 28–page report, *Lighting Up: Tobacco Use Among BC Adolescents*, is also available. Data in the report and Fact Sheet were collected in 1998 through the Adolescent Health Survey II (AHS II), a 127-item questionnaire administered to 25,838 students in Grades 7-12 in schools throughout BC. In 1992, 15,549 students participated in AHS I.

AHS I and II were conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, information and community-based participation projects.

### Smoking Status By Age And Gender, BC 1998

		Non-smokers	Current Smokers
Males and Females	12-14 years	93%	7%
	15-18+ years	78%	22%
	All ages	85%	15%
Males	12-14 years	94%	6%
	15-18+ years	80%	20%
	All ages	87%	13%
Females	12-14 years	93%	7%
	15-18+ years	77%	23%
	All ages	83%	17%

### Cigarette Smoking, BC 1992 Versus 1998 AHS

	Ever smoked a cigarette		Smoking cigarettes on 1+ days in the past month	
	1992	1998	1992	1998
<b>Students:</b>				
12-14 years	33%	33%	18%	16%
15-18+	54%	57%	31%	33%
Males	43%	44%	23%	23%
Females	45%	48%	28%	27%
All	44%	46%	25%	25%

### Terminology

**Current smoker:** has smoked 100+ cigarettes in lifetime, was smoking everyday or occasionally at the time of the survey, and/ or smoked on 1+ days in month prior to the survey.

**Non smoker:** includes lifetime abstainers (never smoked whole cigarette), experimenter (smoked one whole cigarette, but less than 100 cigarettes in lifetime) and former smokers (smoked 100+ cigarettes in lifetime, but not smoking at time of survey or on any day in the month prior to the survey).



## Starting And Quitting

Most cigarette smokers start smoking at an early age. For students who have ever smoked a whole cigarette, about two-thirds report doing so for the first time when they were between the ages of 11 and 14 years. Twenty-one percent of these students say they smoked their first cigarette at age 10 or younger, while just 12% smoked their first cigarette at age 15 or older.

Over half of current smokers say they have tried to quit smoking. Among all students who smoked cigarettes during the past month in 1992, 49% indicated they had made one or more quit attempts in the past 6 months. In the 1998 survey, this percentage had increased to 57%.

## Geography

Cigarette smoking is more popular among adolescents in some parts of the province. The Greater Vancouver area has more students who have never smoked (60%), than the seven other geographic areas (at about 50%). The proportion of students of all ages who are current smokers is lowest in the Greater Vancouver area (at 13%), and highest in the Northwest area of the province (at 23%).

## Passive Smoking

Even non-smoking youth often are involuntarily exposed to tobacco smoke in places where they live, work and play. Regular exposure of non-smokers to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS, sometimes called passive smoking) has been shown to cause a variety of illnesses. About 19% of non-smoking students (representing 15% of all students in the province) report that they are exposed to ETS at home every day or almost every day. Combined

data on current cigarette smoking (15%) and on exposure to ETS (15%) suggest that the health of about 30% of BC adolescents is presently being threatened by active or passive smoking.

## Health Status

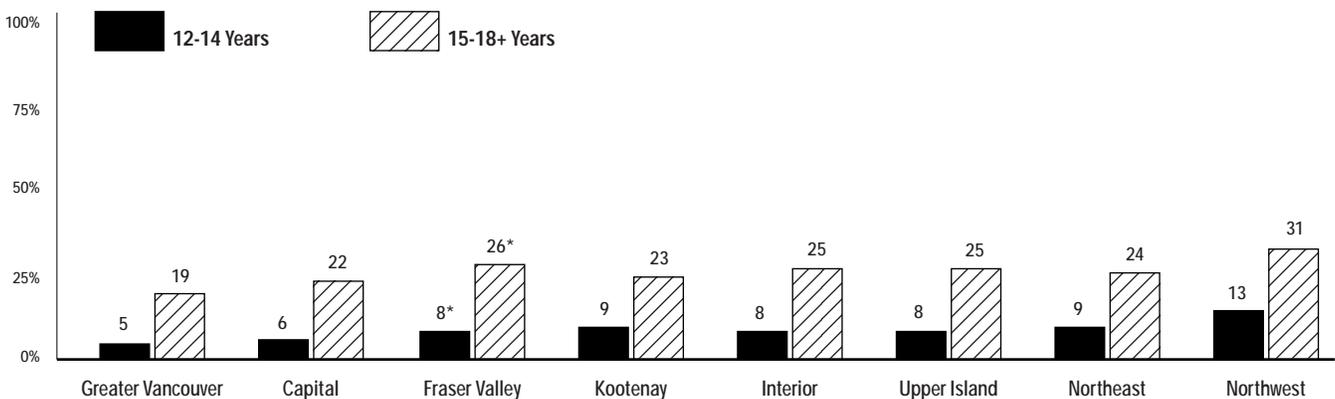
Students who are current smokers are considerably more likely than non-smokers to rate their own health status as just fair or poor (28% vs. 10%). They are also more likely to report having one or more physical or emotional health complaints during the past six months.

A much higher percentage of smokers report being emotionally distressed during the past year. Seventeen percent of current smokers compared with just 5% of non-smoking students report that they had made one or more suicide attempts in the past year.

**Age At First Cigarette, BC 1998**

	Age 10 or under	11-14 years	15+ years
<b>Students who have smoked a whole cigarette:</b>			
12-14 years	33%	67%	N/A
15-18+ years	15%	67%	18%
Males	23%	64%	13%
Females	18%	71%	11%
All	21%	67%	12%

**Current Cigarette Smoking By Age And Geographic Area, BC 1998**



### Personal Qualities And Connectedness

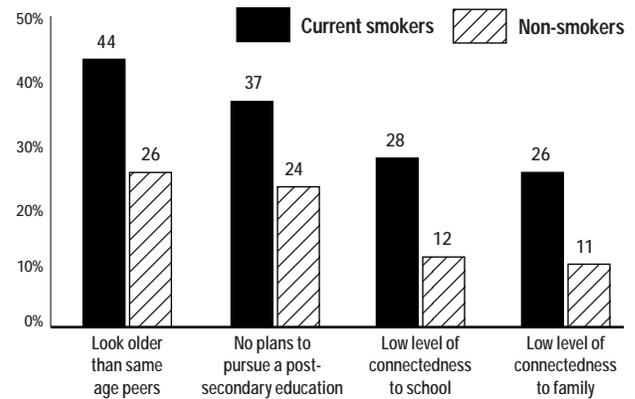
Smoking status appears to be related to a variety of personal qualities. Students who believe they look older than their peers and those who do not plan to pursue a post-secondary education are more likely to smoke. Students who like school and see themselves as being one of the best students in their class are less likely to be smokers.

AHS II also collected a new category of information through a series of questions about connectedness, a term used to describe how youth feel about their relationships with friends, family and school. Students who report lower levels of connectedness to family and school are more likely to smoke than students who report higher levels of connectedness. Twenty-eight percent of current smokers indicated they had a low level of connectedness to their families, compared to just 12% of non-smokers. Similarly, 26% of current smokers scored low on connectedness to school, compared to 11% of non-smoking students. Non-smoking students were twice as likely as current smokers to say they would turn to their parents first for help with personal problems.

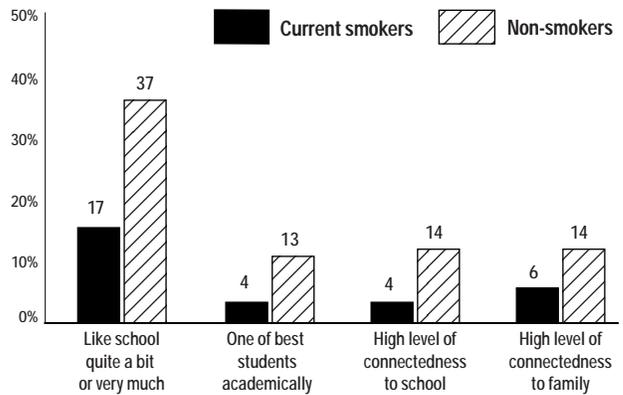
### Smoking And Risky Behaviour

Cigarette smoking is also related to various types of risk-taking behaviours. Among BC students, more current smokers than non-smokers report: 1) using alcohol ten or more times in the past month 2) binge drinking on one or more occasions during the past month 3) using marijuana 40 or more times in their life; 4) using other illegal drugs 10 or more times in their life; 5) ever driving after drinking alcohol or using drugs; 6) having driven a vehicle in the past month after drinking alcohol; and 7) having ever had sexual intercourse.

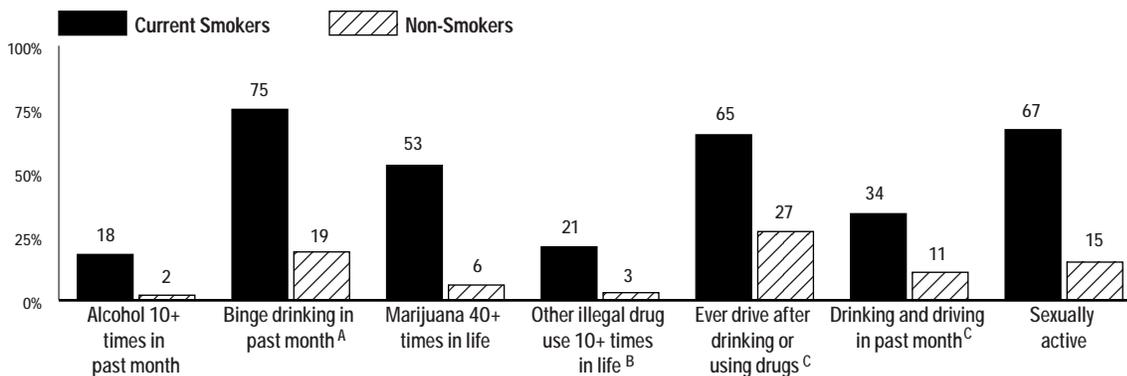
**Personal Qualities Positively Associated With Cigarette Smoking, BC 1998**



**Personal Qualities Negatively Associated With Cigarette Smoking, BC 1998**



**Risk-taking Indicators Associated With Cigarette Smoking, BC 1998**



## Tobacco Sources

AHS II asked current smokers to indicate where they usually obtain their cigarettes. About half of all current smokers aged 12 to 18 years report that they usually get cigarettes from their friends, either through purchase or simply being given cigarettes. About 15% of all current smokers are given cigarettes by their parents, and another 15% sneak them from their parents.

While sale of tobacco to minors is illegal in BC, these restrictions do not seem to be very effective. It appears easy for teen smokers to purchase cigarettes directly from virtually every type of retailer. Convenience stores and gas stations are favourite sources for younger and older students alike. Forty-five percent of current smokers aged 12 to 14 and 67% of smokers aged 15 to 18 report purchasing their cigarettes from convenience stores. About a quarter of 12 to 14 year olds and 45% of 15 to 18 year olds usually purchase cigarettes from gas stations. Clearly, BC needs to improve enforcement of laws prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to minors.

## Prevention That Works

Most young people are already aware of the health risks associated with smoking, yet too many teens still choose to smoke. Smoking prevention programs appear to have had limited success in reducing smoking rates in this age group. New data on smoking from AHS II suggests that tobacco education programs for youth may be doomed to ineffectiveness when they do not take into account the social environments of adolescents.

To positively influence youth choices about smoking, tobacco control initiatives must consider the inter-relationships between home and school environments, as well as the influence of peers. Smoking prevention programs for youth may need to focus more on enhancing open and meaningful communication, creating supportive home and school environments that discourage tobacco use.

A better understanding of the social context of adolescent smoking behaviour is essential for the development of smoking prevention and cessation methods that can achieve long-term positive outcomes in the future.

Notes: † Responses from a small number of students aged 19 are included in these results

A Binge drinking was defined as consuming five or more drinks of alcohol within a couple of hours

B Includes hallucinogens, cocaine, mushrooms, inhalants, amphetamines, heroin and perscription pills without a doctor's consent

C Licensed drivers only

\* High sampling variability, interpret with caution

# Insufficient data available to make an accurate estimate

## Current Smokers Usual Sources For Obtaining Cigarettes By Age Group, BC 1998

	Age 12-14 years	Age 15-18 years
Parents give them to me	12%	18%
I sneak them from parents	27%*	11%
Friends give them to me	58%*	51%
I purchase from friends	53%*	38%
I purchase from convenience store	45%*	67%
I purchase from supermarket	10%	18%
I purchase from restaurant	6%	11%
I purchase from gas station	23%	45%
I purchase from drug store	5%	10%
I purchase from hotel/motel	#	4%
I purchase from smoke shop	12%	19%
I purchase from pub/lounge	5%	11%

## The McCreary Centre Society AHS Reports

*Healthy Connections: Listening to BC Youth (1999)*

### Regional Reports for AHS II

Reports are available for 11 Ministry for Children and Families' regions and 16 Ministry of Health Regions.

### Other Fact Sheets Available

Silk Road: Health of Chinese Youth in BC

Mirror Images: Weight Issues Among BC Youth

Marijuana: Use Among BC Youth

Safe & Sound: Injury Issues Among BC Youth

Keeping Fit: Physical Activity Among BC Youth

Healthy Connections: Connectedness & BC Youth



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