

## National Prevalence and Trends

### Adults

- Twenty percent (21.3%) of all adult African Americans smoke. Among African American adults, smoking rates are significantly higher among men (24%) than women (19%).<sup>1</sup>
- Although the overall smoking rate among African American adults is comparable to smoking rates among white adults (22.1%), other racial and ethnic differences exist. For instance, African American adults have a significantly higher smoking prevalence rate than both Hispanics (14.5%) and Asian Americans (12%).<sup>1</sup>
- In 2000, 37% of all African Americans who had ever smoked had quit, compared with 41% of American Indians/Alaska Natives, 43% of Hispanics, 45% of Asians and 51% of whites.<sup>2</sup>

### Youth

- In middle school, 5.2% of African American students smoke cigarettes. Among high school students, 7.4% of African Americans smoke cigarettes.<sup>3</sup>
- In middle school, African Americans smoke cigarettes at similar rates as whites (4.3%). In high school, however, African Americans smoke cigarettes at significantly lower rates than whites (7.4% vs. 19.4%).<sup>3</sup>
- African American youth are more likely to initiate smoking at a later age than white youth. About 40% of African Americans who have ever smoked started between ages 18 and 21.<sup>4</sup>

## Health Impact

- **Mortality** — Based on 1995 estimates, the most recent data available, the tobacco-related death toll among African Americans is 45,000 per year.<sup>5</sup>
- **Heart Disease** — In 2007, heart disease killed 71,209 African Americans; 35,669 African American men and 35,540 African American women.<sup>6</sup> Smoking is a major cause of heart disease.<sup>7</sup>
- **Stroke** — Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the U.S. and among African Americans. In 2007, 9,536 African American women and 7,549 African American men died of stroke.<sup>6</sup> Smoking increases the risk for stroke.<sup>7</sup>
- **Cancer** — Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. and among African Americans. In 2007, 6,655 African American women and 9,839 African American men died of lung, trachea or bronchus cancer.<sup>6</sup> Cigarette smoking is a major cause of these cancers.<sup>7</sup>
  - o African Americans, and particularly males, have experienced lung cancer at higher rates than whites for many years. The reason for this remains unclear, but racial differences in smoking habits, socioeconomic variables, and the metabolism of tobacco carcinogens may all play an important role.<sup>8</sup>

## Tobacco Preferences

### Menthol Cigarettes

- In 2009, 77% of African American middle school smokers, and 81% of African Americans high school smokers used menthol cigarettes.<sup>9</sup>
- In high school, rates of menthol use are significantly higher among African Americans than among youths of other races/ethnicities. Among high school smokers, 62% of Hispanic and 48% of white youths smoke menthol cigarettes.<sup>9</sup>
- Approximately 83% of African-American smokers aged 12 and over smoke menthol cigarettes compared to 24% of whites.<sup>10</sup>
- Newport, an almost exclusively menthol brand, is the most popular cigarette brand among Black youths. Sixty percent (59.7%) of Black established smokers in middle school and 78.6% of Black established smokers in high school smoke Newport cigarettes.<sup>11</sup>

### Little Cigars/Cigarillos

- The use of little cigars is a rising problem for at risk African American youth. In addition, many youth incorrectly believe that little cigars are less addictive and less harmful than cigarettes.<sup>12</sup>

## Industry Targeting

- Since the 1960's, the tobacco industry has labeled the African American population as a strategically important market, one whose search for recognition and empowerment made them a target for existing and new brands specifically marketed to help African Americans build their own identity.<sup>13, 14</sup>
- Once secret documents show that the tobacco industry has systematically sought influence in the African American community, offering resources and forging alliances with Black organizations and community leaders in an effort to use African American voices to defend pro-tobacco policy and oppose tobacco control laws.<sup>15</sup>
- A literature review of billboard and magazine advertisements for tobacco related products in 2007 found that there are 2.6 times as many tobacco advertisements per person in African American neighborhoods than Caucasian neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup>

## Smoking and Perceived Racial Discrimination

- African Americans report that racial discrimination is a stressor in their lives.<sup>17-19</sup> For some, smoking is a method of managing and coping with stress<sup>20</sup> such as experiencing racial harassment.
- In one study, African American college students who reported racial harassment were twice as likely to use tobacco products daily compared to those with no reported harassment.<sup>19</sup> Another study of African American adolescent girls found evidence that perceived discrimination and race-related stress were strongly associated with smoking.<sup>18</sup>

## SOURCES

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