

## SACRED TOBACCO USE

Tobacco plays an important role in American Indian cultures. Historically, tobacco was seen as a symbol for peace and healing. Used in medicinal and religious ceremonies, as well as for instructional purposes, tobacco has long been considered a sacred gift of the earth to many American Indians. Traditional use of tobacco by American Indians does not resemble the common cigarette smoking; deep inhalation of tobacco smoke was not encouraged, as the smoke was not meant to be enjoyed, rather the gesture was symbolic.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Adults

#### Cigarette Smoking

- Twenty-three percent (23.2%) of adult American Indians and Alaska Natives smoke. American Indians and Alaska Natives have the second highest prevalence of smoking after adults who reported being of multiple races (29.5%).<sup>3</sup>
- Forty one percent (40.9%) of American Indians who ever smoked have quit, compared with 51.0% of whites, 44.7% of Asians, 42.9% of Hispanics, and 37.3% of African Americans.<sup>4</sup>

#### Smokeless Tobacco Use

- In 2008, a higher percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native adults used smokeless tobacco (5.7%) compared with adults of other races/ethnicities. White (4.6%) and multiple race adults (4.6%) had the second highest prevalence.<sup>5</sup>

#### Cigar Use

- Seven percent (7.2%) of American Indian/Alaska Native adults smoke cigars. This is higher than the percentages of cigar smokers who are white (5.3%), Hispanic (4.9%), or Asian (1.5%), but lower than those who are of multiple race (8.5%) or African American (7.7%).<sup>6</sup>

## Youth

### Cigarette Smoking

- The prevalence of current smoking among American Indian/Alaska Native youth, ages 12-17, is 11.6%. This is lower than the smoking prevalence among multiple race youth (12.9%), but higher than rates among youth of other races/ethnicities.<sup>7</sup>
- Data from high school students show that current smoking among American Indians/Alaska Natives is as high as 19.9%, which is second only to the prevalence among youth of multiple races (20.2%).<sup>8</sup>
- From 1996 through 2000, the smoking rate among American Indians in grade 12 was estimated to be 46%.<sup>9</sup>

### Cigar Use

- Four percent (4.2%) of American Indian/Alaska Native youth smoke cigars. Cigar use prevalence among whites is slightly higher (4.6%), while rates among Hispanics (3.4%), African Americans (3.3%), and Asians (1.0%) are lower.<sup>4</sup>

### Smokeless Tobacco Use

- Smokeless tobacco use prevalence among youth, ages 12-17, is higher for American Indians/Alaska Natives (5.5%) compared with youth of other races/ethnicities. Prevalence among white youth is 3.5%, followed by multiple race youth (2.7%), Hispanics (1.0%), and African Americans (0.2%).<sup>3</sup>

## Health Impact

- Tobacco use is associated with heart disease and cancer, the two leading causes of death among American Indian and Alaskan Native adults.<sup>10, 11</sup>
- **Cardiovascular Disease** — Cardiovascular disease is the primary cause of death in the United States and among American Indians and Alaska Natives. Heart disease and stroke together accounted for 24% of all deaths among American Indians and Alaska Natives in 2007.<sup>11</sup> It has been estimated that up to 30% of deaths from cardiovascular disease in the United States are attributable to tobacco use.<sup>12</sup>
- **Heart Disease** — In 2007, heart disease killed more than 2,600 American Indians and Alaska Natives.<sup>11</sup> Smoking causes coronary heart disease.<sup>10</sup>
- **Stroke** — Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States. In 2007 nearly 600 American Indians/Alaska Natives died of stroke.<sup>11</sup> Smoking increases the risk for strokes.<sup>10</sup>

- **Cancer** — Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States and among American Indians and Alaska Natives. Nearly 18% of American Indian deaths are attributable to cancer. More than 2,500 American Indians/Alaska Natives died of cancer in 2007.<sup>11</sup> Cigarette smoking causes many types of cancer, including cancers of the lung, esophagus, larynx, mouth, throat, bladder, cervix, kidney, stomach, and uterus, and acute myeloid leukemia.<sup>10</sup>
- **Lung Cancer** — Nearly 700 American Indians/Alaska Natives died of lung cancer in 2007; 384 men and 311 women.<sup>11</sup> American Indian/Alaska Native men have lower death rates for lung cancer than African American and white men, but higher death rates than Asian American or Hispanic men.<sup>13</sup>
- Because people who identify themselves as American Indian or Alaska Natives are sometimes reported as white on death certificates, the figures provided above may underestimate the real number of deaths among American Indians/Alaska Natives.<sup>14</sup>

## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Tobacco Use Among U.S. Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups- African Americans, American Indians, and Alaska Natives, American Indians and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Changing Adolescent Smoking Prevalence; Where it is and Why. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 14. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute.

<sup>3</sup> CDC. Vital Signs: Cigarette Smoking Among Adults Aged ≥ 18 Years—United States, 2009. MMWR 2010; 59(35):1135-1140.

<sup>4</sup> CDC. Cigarette Smoking Among Adults—United States, 2000. MMWR 2002; 51(29):642-645.

<sup>5</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables on Smokeless Tobacco Use. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, 2010. Available at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k9NSDUH/tabs/Sect2peTabs27to31.pdf>. Accessed on October 21, 2010. (Results from 2008 were reported because there were not enough data on smokeless tobacco use among American Indian/Alaska Native adults from 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables on Cigar Use. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, 2010. Available at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k9NSDUH/tabs/Sect2peTabs32to36.pdf>. Accessed on October 21, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables on Cigarette Use. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, 2010. Available at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k9NSDUH/tabs/Sect2peTabs22to26.pdf>. Accessed on October 21, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Calculations based on data from the 2009 National Youth Tobacco Survey. CDC. Office of Smoking and Health, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Wallace JM, Bachman JG, O'Malley OM, Johnston LD, Schulenberg JE, Cooper SM. Tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use: racial and ethnic differences among U.S. high school seniors. Public Health Rep 2002;117 Suppl 1:S67-S75.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Xu J, Kochanek K, Murphy SL, Tejada-Vera, B. 2010. "Deaths: Final Data for 2007." National Vital Statistics Reports. Vol 58 (19). Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. Available at [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr58/nvsr58\\_19.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr58/nvsr58_19.pdf). Accessed October 21, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> McGinnis JM, Foege WH. (1993) Actual Causes of Death in the United States. The Journal of the American Medical Association; 270: 2207-12.

<sup>13</sup> CDC. Recent Trends in Mortality Rates for Four Major Cancers, by Sex and Race/Ethnicity- United States, 1990-1998. MMWR 2002;51:49-53.

<sup>14</sup> Hahn RA, Truman BI, Barker ND. Identifying ancestry: the reliability of ancestral identification in the United States by self, proxy, interviewer, and funeral director. Epidemiology 1996;7:75-80.