

African Americans and Smoking

NATIONAL PREVALENCE AND TRENDS

Adults

- Twenty-two percent (22%) of all adult African Americans smoke. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of African American men smoke and 17% of African American women smoke.¹
- The overall smoking rate among African American adults is lower compared with the rates among American Indians (32%) but higher compared with Hispanics (16%) and Asian Americans (13%) and approximately equal to that of Whites (22%).¹
- Thirty-seven percent (37%) of all African Americans who ever smoked have quit, compared with 41% of American Indians, 43% of Hispanics, 45% of Asians and 51% of Whites.²

Youth

- In middle school, 8% of African American students smoke. In high school, 11% of African American students smoke.³
- In middle school, African Americans smoke at similar rates as Whites (8%). In high school, African Americans smoke at significantly lower rates than Whites (11% vs. 25%).³
- African American youth are more likely to initiate smoking at a later age than White youth. About 40% of African Americans become regular smokers between ages 18 and 21.⁴

HEALTH IMPACT

- **Mortality**—1995 estimates, the most recent data available, estimated the tobacco-related death toll among African Americans at 45,000 per year.⁵
- **Cardiovascular Disease**—Cardiovascular disease is the primary cause of death in the United States and among African Americans. Heart disease and stroke together accounted for about one third of all deaths among African Americans in 2001.⁶ It is estimated that as many as 30% of African American deaths from cardiovascular disease are a result of tobacco use.⁷
- **Heart Disease**—In 2001, heart disease killed 76,794 African Americans; 40,253 African American women and 36,541 men.⁶ Smoking is a major cause of heart disease.⁸
- **Stroke**—Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the U.S. and among African Americans. In 2001, 11,016 African American women and 7,828 African American men died of stroke.⁶ Smoking increases the risk for stroke.⁸
- **Cancer**—Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. and among African Americans. 5,853 African American women and 10,030 African American men died of lung, trachea or bronchus cancer in 2001.⁶ Cigarette smoking is a major cause of these cancers.⁸

- **Lung Cancer**—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.⁹

TOBACCO PREFERENCES

Light Cigarettes

- Eight percent (8%) of African American adults smoke light cigarettes compared to 80% of White and 7% of Hispanic adults.¹⁰
- Twenty-two percent (22%) of African American smokers in middle school smoke light cigarettes compared with 32% of White, 30% of Hispanic and 18% of Asian American smokers in middle school.¹¹
- Fourteen percent (14%) of African American smokers in high school use light cigarettes compared with 46% of White, 36% of Asian American and 35% of Hispanic smokers in high school.¹¹

Menthol Cigarettes

- In middle school, 64% of African American smokers use menthol cigarettes. In high school, 79% of African Americans who smoke use menthol cigarettes.¹²
- In high school, rates of menthol use are significantly higher among African Americans than among youth of other races/ethnicities. Among high school smokers, 51% of Asian American and Hispanic and 37% of White youth smoke menthol cigarettes.¹²

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