

Parental smoking is a key factor in children starting and continuing to smoke

Description

Parental smoking behaviour and parental attitudes about smoking are key influences in predicting whether children and young people will start and continue to smoke.

Summary of evidence

A 2001 New Zealand study found that adolescents whose parents smoke were more likely to be daily smokers themselves compared with those whose parents were both non-smokers.¹ When this survey was repeated in 2006, it was estimated that approximately 40% of adolescent smoking was due to parental smoking.² In the 2007 survey, students who had at least one parent who smoked were three times more likely to be daily smokers, compared with those whose parents did not smoke.³ There is some evidence that adolescents' perceptions of parental attitudes about smoking may be an even stronger influence than parental smoking behaviour. A study conducted in the U.S. found that students who did not perceive parental disapproval of smoking were twice as likely to become smokers compared with those who perceived that their parents disapproved of smoking.⁴

Cited in the following publications

- Ministry of Health (2008).⁵
"...helping parents to quit is crucial to further reducing smoking initiation by children and young people" (p. 9).
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control (2006).⁶
"Factors associated with youth tobacco use include ... smoking by parents or guardians...".
- U.S. Surgeon General's Report (2000).⁷
"...young people will perceive contradictory or inconsistent messages in our prevention efforts if programs do not also address the smoking behaviour of millions of parents and other adult role models..." (p. 435).

Specific findings

- In 2007, the Action on Smoking and Health Year 10 Snapshot Survey found that of students whose parents did not smoke, 3% were daily smokers, compared with 9.9% of students who had at least one parent who smoked.³
- In 2006, the Action on Smoking and Health Year 10 Snapshot Survey found that 43% of female daily smoking and 41% of male daily smoking at 14- to 15-years was attributed to parental smoking. This means that out of every ten students who smoked on a daily basis, four did so because they were influenced by their parents' smoking.²
- In 2001, the Action on Smoking and Health Year 10 Snapshot Survey found that parental smoking was a key determinant of students' daily smoking across all ethnic groups. The risk ratios of daily smoking in students where both parents were smokers compared with students whose parents were both non-smokers, were 6.64 (95% CI=3.56-11.49) for Asian students, 3.11 (95% CI=2.72-3.53) for European students,

3.05 (95% CI=2.42-3.77) for Pacific students and 1.74 (95% CI=1.48-2.01) for Maori students. This means that for Maori students, for example, students of parents who both smoked were nearly twice as likely to be daily smokers compared with students of parents who both did not smoke.¹

- In 2000, a prospective study of over 5,000 U.S. families showed that parental smoking behaviour had a critical influence over both initiation of smoking (first cigarette smoked) and continuation of adolescent smoking behaviour. The researchers calculated a 32% probability that parental smoking influenced their child to try smoking, and a 28% probability that parental smoking influenced children to make the transition from monthly to daily smoking.⁸
- Parental attitudes regarding children's smoking are also important. A 2001 U.S. study found that approximately two-thirds of young people who thought that their parents strongly disapproved of smoking were "non-susceptible never smokers", compared with only one-third of students who thought that neither parent disapproved of smoking. In addition, the researchers found that two years later, students who initially perceived that their parents disapproved of smoking were half as likely to have become "established smokers". The perceived parental disapproval of smoking was more strongly associated with adolescent smoking than parental smoking behaviour.⁴

¹ Scragg, R., Laugesen, M., & Robinson, E. (2003). Parental smoking and related behaviours influence adolescent tobacco smoking: results from the 2001 New Zealand national survey of 4th form students. *New Zealand Medical Journal* 116, 1-14.

² Scragg, R. & Glover, M. (2007). Parental and adolescent smoking: Does the association vary with gender and ethnicity? *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 120, 1-11. (<http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/120-1267/2862/>, retrieved October 2008).

³ Paynter, J. (2007). *National Year 10 ASH snapshot survey, 1999-2007: Trends in tobacco use by students aged 14-15 years*. Wellington: Ministry of Health, Action on Smoking and Health, Health Sponsorship Council.

⁴ Sargent, J.D. & Dalton, M. (2001). Does parental disapproval of smoking prevent adolescents from becoming established smokers? *Pediatrics*, 108, 1256-1262.

⁵ Ministry of Health (2008). *ABC strategy for smoking cessation: Framework and work programme* (draft). New Zealand: Ministry of Health.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006). *Fact sheet - Youth and tobacco use: current estimates*. (http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/youth_tobacco.htm, retrieved October 2008).

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000). *Reducing Tobacco Use. A vision for the future – reducing tobacco use in the new millennium*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health. (http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_2000/sgr_tobacco_chap.htm, retrieved October 2008).

⁸ Bricker, J.B., Peterson, Jr A.V., Leroux, B.G., Andersen, M.R., Rajan, K.B., & Sarason, I.G. (2005). Prospective prediction of children's smoking transitions: Role of parents' and older siblings' smoking. *Addiction*, 101, 128-136.