

# Teens unaware of 'social' smoking dangers

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Research has found two in three teenagers wrongly believe 'social' or occasional smoking is harmless, prompting concern from public health experts.

Analysis of the Victorian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug survey of 4500 12 to 17-year-olds conducted in 2014 reveals awareness about the dangers of tobacco smoking has not improved much over the past decade.

The report, released by Cancer Council Victoria on Tuesday, found just one third (29 per cent) of the students knew smoking one or two tobacco cigarettes occasionally posed serious health risks such as lung cancer and stroke.

While 85 per cent of students knew that smoking 10 or more cigarettes a day was very dangerous, this level of awareness had not changed since since 2008.

Students were more likely to try cigarettes or smoke regularly as they progressed through high school - 12 per cent of 17-year-olds reported smoking in the past seven days, versus two per cent of 12-year-olds.

Quit Victoria director Dr Sarah White said the figures were alarming and called for more to be done to educate young Australians about the dangers of smoking.

"This new data clearly shows that the 'every cigarette is doing you damage' message is not getting through to our young people," Dr White said.

There was no safe level of smoking, she warned.

"New research out of the UK shows smoking just one cigarette a day substantially increases a person's risk of heart disease and stroke," Dr White said.

In Australia, smoking kills an estimated 15,000 people every year.

"The only way to avoid the harmful health effects associated with smoking is to avoid cigarettes entirely," said Dr White.