

Significant Drop as Teen Cigarette Smoking Hits 7% Reason For Celebration, But The Fight Is Not Over

Statement on Monitoring the Future 2015 by Robin Koval CEO and President of Truth Initiative

Teen cigarette use has declined to an historic low of 7 percent, proving that national efforts to prevent teen smoking are working. The 2015 Monitoring the Future survey found cigarette use by 8th, 10th and 12th graders in the U.S. continues to drop. That means public education efforts like our **truth**[®] campaign and The Real Cost campaign from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are working. The U.S. teen smoking rate has decreased by more than 25 percent in the two years since we re-launched **truth** to make this the generation of youth who end tobacco use.

Unfortunately use of little cigars (“cigarillos”) and e-cigarettes by teens present new challenges that may undermine the downward path of tobacco use. Little cigars are attracting new youth to use tobacco. According to this new Monitoring the Future data, when cigarillo use is added to cigarette use it raises the teen smoking rate by more than half – from 6.7 percent to 11.2 percent. The survey also shows 87 percent of teens who smoked cigarillos used flavored versions. Often teens mistakenly believe these products are less harmful than cigarettes because of how they smell and taste. Meanwhile, although past 30-day e-cigarette use remains disturbingly high (and 8th grader use has increased to 9.5 percent from 8.7 percent in 2014), we are somewhat encouraged to see e-cigarette use plateauing among 10th and 12th graders (10th grader use is down from 16.2 percent to 14 percent and 12th grader use is down from 17.1 percent to 16.2 percent). Interestingly, much of the reported e-cigarette use appears to reflect experimentation, with more than half of students who tried them saying it was out of curiosity. About 40 percent of students who tried e-cigarettes said it’s because they tasted good – demonstrating that flavors in such products make them more attractive to young people.

The increased use of non-traditional tobacco products documented by the survey should be all the motivation FDA needs to finish a process that started nearly two years ago, when FDA released a draft of deeming regulations that would give the agency authority to regulate products like little cigars and e-cigarettes in much the same manner as cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. It is long past time for final regulations, and for next steps such as protecting youth from flavors designed to promote experimentation.

Federal policy, when combined with public education campaigns and evidence-based interventions such as clean indoor air laws and excise taxes on tobacco products are proven to save lives. By doing what’s worked to drive youth cigarette use to unprecedented lows, we can achieve the same dramatic declines in teen use of other tobacco products.

Truth Initiative is committed to helping youth and young adults understand the deadly and addictive aspects of non-traditional products such as hookah and little cigars. In August, **truth** introduced the first in a series of advertisements designed to make teens aware of the consequences of using hookah and little cigars and make the case that “social smoking” is still smoking. And **truth** will continue to focus on these deadly combustible products.

The tobacco industry is spending nearly \$10 billion each year marketing tobacco products in the U.S. alone. The fight against youth tobacco use is bigger than the fight against cigarettes, and it will not be over until we make this the generation of Americans who end tobacco use for good.

