

Utah Health Status Update:

Youth Tobacco Survey, Utah 2003

May 2004

Utah Department of Health

Tobacco use remains a leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States and Utah. It increases the risk for chronic lung disease, coronary heart disease, and stroke, as well as cancer of the lungs, larynx, esophagus, mouth, and bladder. Nearly all first use of tobacco occurs before high school graduation. Since the likelihood of lifetime tobacco use is linked to early initiation, long-term reductions in tobacco-related disease and death depend on effective tobacco use prevention among youth.

To monitor tobacco use among middle school and high school students, the Utah Department of Health conducts the Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In 2003, 2,796 students in 100 middle schools and 2,587 students in 90 high schools participated in the survey. In addition to prevalence of tobacco use, YTS questions cover access to tobacco products, addiction, cessation, exposure to secondhand smoke, and tobacco-related knowledge, attitudes, and intentions. This report summarizes 2003 YTS findings related to prevalence of tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke. The next Utah YTS will be conducted in the spring of 2005.

Prevalence of Current Tobacco Use

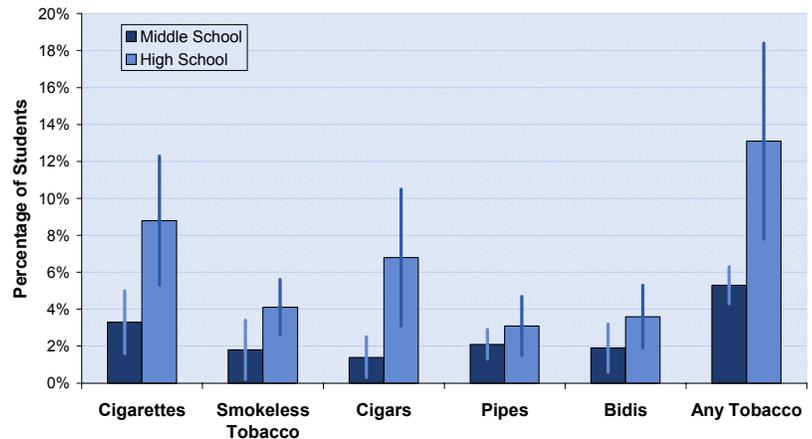
YTS results show that in 2003, 5.3% of middle school students and 13.1% of high school students had used some form of tobacco during the 30 days preceding the survey (Figure 1). In both middle and high school, students reported cigarette smoking as the most common form of tobacco use. In addition, high school students reported frequent cigar use. When compared to risk behavior surveys conducted in the mid-nineties (Utah YRBS 1993, 1995, 1997), current cigarette smoking (having smoked during the 30 days preceding the surveys) reported by Utah students shows a relative decline of almost 50%.

Prevalence of Ever Having Used Tobacco

More than one out of six middle school students (17.5%) and one out of three high school

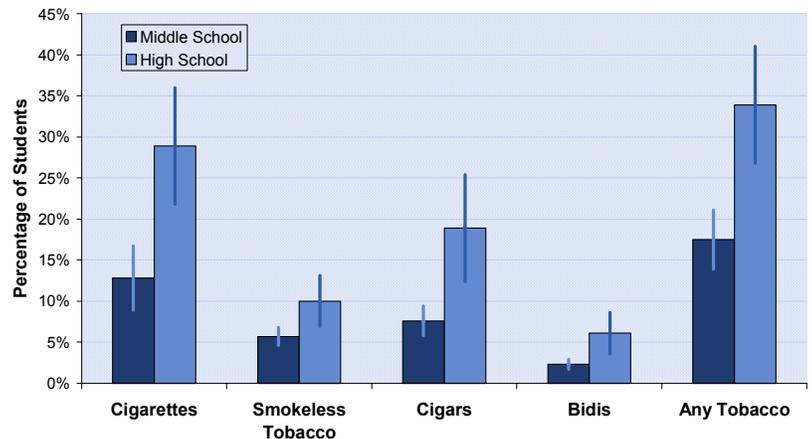
Prevalence of Current Tobacco Use

Figure 1. Percentage of students who reported current use of tobacco by school type and tobacco product, Utah Youth Tobacco Survey, 2003.



Prevalence of Ever Having Used Tobacco

Figure 2. Percentage of students who reported having ever used tobacco by school type and tobacco product, Utah Youth Tobacco Survey, 2003.



students (33.9%) reported that they had used tobacco products during their lifetime. Cigarettes and cigars were listed as the most commonly used forms of tobacco. One out of ten high school students (10%) reported having tried smokeless (i.e. chewing) tobacco (Figure 2). Bidis are exotic-looking, sweet-flavored, filterless cigarettes that are being falsely marketed to teens as “natural” cigarettes.

Exposure to Secondhand Smoke (SHS)

Exposure to SHS has been linked to serious adverse health effects in non-smokers. In addition to increasing the risk for heart disease and lung cancer, exposure to SHS can lead to higher rates of asthma,

ear infections, chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, and sudden infant death syndrome.

Despite low smoking rates among students, YTS data show that exposure to smoke from other people's cigarettes remains a serious problem for Utah youth. Almost 30% of middle school students and almost 40% of high school students reported that they had been in the same room with someone who smoked during week preceding the YTS. Approximately 20% of middle and high school students reported that they were riding in a car with someone who smoked cigarettes during the week preceding the YTS (Figure 3).

Perceived Harmfulness of Secondhand Smoke (SHS)

Overall, most Utah students reported that they were aware of the harmful effects of SHS (Figure 4). Among middle and high school students, smokers were somewhat less likely to perceive SHS as harmful than non-smokers. This difference is not statistically significant.

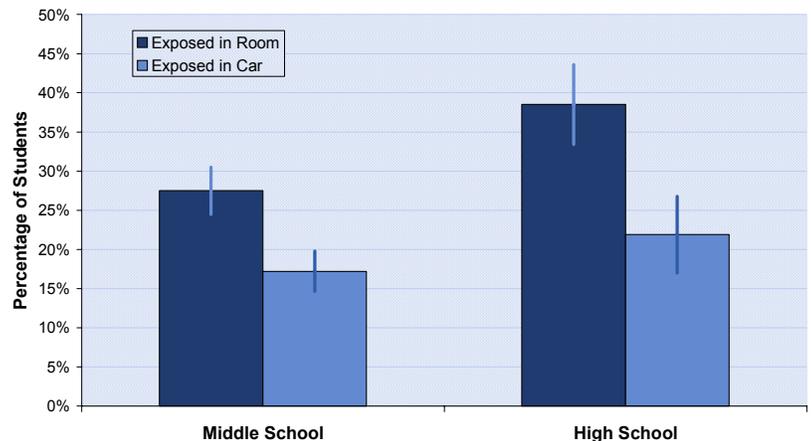
Conclusions

While Utah's youth smoking rates have been declining since the mid- to late nineties, many students remain at risk for adverse health effects caused by tobacco use or exposure to secondhand smoke. Media campaigns as well as school- and community-based tobacco prevention programs continue to be public health priorities. In addition YTS data show that additional policies and educational interventions are needed to better protect Utah students from exposure to secondhand smoke.

Note: YTS data apply only to youth who attend mainstream public schools and are not representative of students in alternative or private schools. As with all surveys, some error results from non-response and over- or underreporting of behaviors. Rigorous survey design and administration minimizes error from these sources.

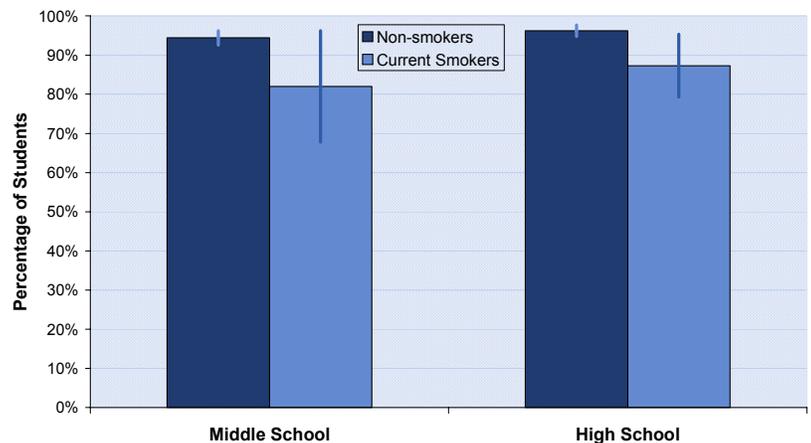
Exposure to Secondhand Smoke

Figure 3. Percentage of students who reported that they had been exposed to cigarette smoke during the past 7 days by type of school and location of exposure, Utah Youth Tobacco Survey, 2003.



Perceived Harmfulness of Secondhand Smoke

Figure 4. Percentage of students who reported thinking that secondhand smoke is harmful to them by type of school and smoking status, Utah Youth Tobacco Survey, 2003.



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For additional information about this topic and the YTS contact the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, Utah Department of Health, P. O. Box 142106, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2106, (801) 538-6141, FAX (801) 538-9303; or by contacting the Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, P.O. Box 142101, Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-2101, (801) 538-6108, FAX (801) 538-9346, email: phdata@utah.gov.