

Youth Tobacco Use in Colorado

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Blazing a Dangerous Trail

Preventing tobacco use among youth has emerged as a major focus of tobacco control efforts because tobacco use and subsequent addiction take root in adolescence. Among adults in the United States who have ever smoked daily, 82 percent tried their first cigarette before 18 years of age and 53 percent became daily smokers before 18 years of age.

Each year, 10,800 Colorado youth under 18 years of age become daily smokers. At this rate, 92,000 Colorado youth alive today will die an early, preventable death because of a decision made as a child.

Colorado's Youth Tobacco Rates Higher than National Averages

Tobacco use among Colorado middle school students is higher than national rates.

More than 25 percent of Colorado students in grades 9 to 12 report smoking cigarettes at least once during the past month.

Many Colorado youth who smoke had their first cigarette when they were 10 years old or younger.

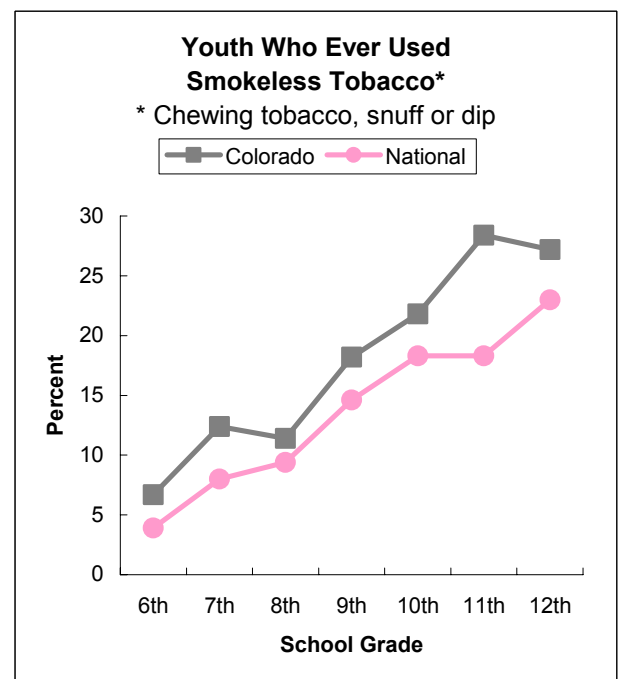
In Colorado, young women of high school age are smoking cigarettes more than their male counterparts.

Smokeless Tobacco

In Colorado, young men in grades 9 to 12 are using smokeless tobacco, which is linked to a variety of oral cancers, at a rate higher than the national average.

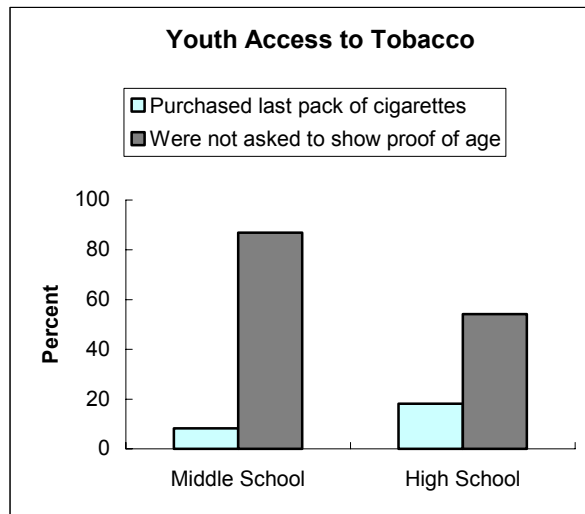
Approximately 24 percent of Colorado high school youth report ever-use, compared with a national rate of 18.3 percent.

Nearly 50 percent of Colorado middle school youth who have tried smokeless tobacco did so before the age of 11, whereas only 20 percent of the state's high school youth tried smokeless tobacco before age 11. This trend indicates that youth are experimenting with smokeless tobacco at increasingly younger ages in Colorado.



Tobacco Industry's Access to Youth

Both Colorado state statutes and federal regulations prohibit the sale of tobacco products to minors under the age of 18 years. Regulations assess merchant compliance with the laws through unannounced inspections of a random sample of the state's tobacco outlets.



Despite laws on the books, it is estimated that between eight to 18 percent of Colorado middle school & high school smokers purchase cigarettes illegally.

What's more, well over half of all youth smokers who try to buy cigarettes in a store are NOT asked to show proof of age.

Ultimately, more than 3 million packs of cigarettes are illegally sold to youth in Colorado each year.

It is imperative that the laws are enforced whereby merchants demand proof of age at the time of purchase.

Youth Tobacco Control Efforts in Colorado

- Tobacco-Free Schools law (CRS 25-14-103.5 [1994, revised 1998]) prohibits tobacco use on all public school property, including buildings, playgrounds, parking areas, in school vehicles and at school-sponsored events.
- Board approval of tobacco-free policies in all Colorado school districts.
- Establishment of more than 50 youth coalitions to promote youth empowerment and advocacy.
- Support of comprehensive school-based tobacco prevention and youth cessation programs.
- Focused efforts by local health departments on youth initiation, cessation and access

Evidence has shown that it is both possible and feasible to **reduce tobacco use, save lives, and save money** through implementation of comprehensive tobacco control programs.

Sources:

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