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December 19, 2001 (11)
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Cigarette smoking among American teens declines sharply in 2001.

FOR RELEASE AT 10 A.M. EST, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2001.

EDITORS: Results of this year's Monitoring the Future survey are being released jointly by the Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, D.C, which sponsors the study, and by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, which conducts the study. For further information on the study, contact the principal investigator, Lloyd D. Johnston, at (734) 763-5043.

ANN ARBOR---In a year in which good news seems hard to come by, there is some good news from the health front: Cigarette smoking, the leading cause of preventable death and disease in this country, is falling sharply among American teenagers. The latest national survey in the Monitoring the Future series, conducted by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (ISR), shows that teen smoking is rapidly declining.

Based on nationally representative surveys of some 44,000 students in grades 8, 10, and 12, ISR research scientists have found that adolescent smoking is declining at a vigorous pace. This contrasts to the dramatic increase in teen smoking observed in the early 1990s, says study director Lloyd D. Johnston.

"Because the teen years are critical in the initiation of nearly all lifetime smoking

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habits, what happens during that developmental period is vital to the eventual health and longevity of each generation," Johnston notes. "That's what made the sharp increase in the early 1990s so worrisome, and it is also what makes this decline, which began in the latter half of the 1990s, so encouraging."

The 2001 Monitoring the Future survey included students in 424 public and private secondary schools throughout the coterminous United States. Johnston and his fellow social psychologists Jerald G. Bachman and Patrick M. O'Malley have been conducting the study since 1975, with support provided by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, one of the National Institutes of Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The annual surveys have included high school seniors (12th-graders) since 1975, and nationally representative samples of 8th- and 10th-graders since 1991. Questionnaires are administered to students in their classrooms by ISR staff members each spring.

Current smoking (defined as smoking one or more cigarettes during the past 30 days) had been declining steadily since the recent peak levels reached in 1996 among 8th- and 10th-graders, and in 1997 among 12th-graders. [Table 1 and Figure 1] Between 1996 and 2001, current smoking among 8th-graders fell from 21 percent to 12 percent, and among 10th-graders from 30 percent to 21 percent. (These represent proportional declines of about four-tenths and three-tenths, respectively.)

Among 12th-graders, current smoking fell from 37 percent in 1997 to 30 percent in 2001---a proportional decline of about two-tenths. Thus, the younger age groups have shown the greatest improvement so far. The drop in current smoking that occurred just

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this year---of 2.5 percentage-points in 8th-grade and 2.6 percentage-points in 10th-grade---are highly statistically significant, while the 2.0 percentage-point decline in 12th-grade fell just short of being significant.

Prior to the peak teen smoking rates reached in the mid-1990s, current smoking among 8th- and 10th-graders had been rising rapidly, with about a 50 percent increase occurring between 1991 and 1996. Smoking had been rising among 12th-graders, as well, though not by as large a proportion.

The rates of *daily* current smoking in the three grade levels (defined as having one or more cigarettes per day over the past 30 days) have shown parallel trends to those for any current smoking, and likewise have shown important declines in 2001, specifically. [Table 1] This year about one in every 18 8th-graders is a current daily smoker (5.5 percent), one of every eight 10th-graders (12.2 percent), and about one in every five 12th-graders (19.0 percent). These daily smoking rates are down proportionally from their peak levels in 1996 (1997 in the case of the 12th-graders) by about one-half, one-third, and one-quarter, respectively. They are down proportionally just from last year's levels by 26 percent, 13 percent, and 8 percent, respectively.

"These important declines in teen smoking did not just happen by chance," Johnston emphasizes. "A lot of individuals and organizations have been making concerted efforts to bring down the unacceptably high rates of smoking among our youth."

Among the efforts he notes are a number that emerged from the tobacco settlement between the states and the tobacco companies. "The Joe Camel advertising campaign was

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ended, billboard advertising of cigarettes was eliminated, and anti-smoking advertising campaigns were initiated by the newly-formed American Legacy Foundation that was funded under the settlement," Johnston notes. "Further, a number of states launched their own anti-smoking ad campaigns, some also raised their excise taxes on cigarettes, and the industry raised prices in order to cover their costs from the settlement. On top of all of this, the industry received a great deal of negative publicity during the mid- to late-1990s, as their past practices were exposed during the litigation process with the states and in the federal regulatory debates."

A considerable body of research---some of it based on Monitoring the Future data---has shown that price can be an important deterrent to smoking for young people. Work reported last month by the U-M investigators at the World Conference on Smoking or Health in New Orleans shows that, since 1997, the proportion of students reporting frequent exposure to anti-smoking ads has increased considerably. Further, the proportion crediting the ads with actually helping to influence them not to smoke has increased substantially, as well.

Since 1995 there has been some increase at all grade levels in the proportions of students saying that pack-a-day smokers run a "great risk" of "harming themselves (physically or in other ways)," although this belief did not increase any further in 2001. [Table 4 and Figure 1] (The Monitoring the Future study has shown perceived harm to be an important deterrent to young people's use of a number of illicit drugs.) "While many adults believe that young people understand the dangers of smoking, our data suggest that

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a lot of teens still do not---particularly the younger teens," notes Johnston. "For example, some 43 percent of today's 8th-graders still do not think there is a great risk associated with pack-a-day smoking."

In addition, there has been some increase since 1996 (1997 for 12th-graders) in students' personal disapproval of smoking. [Table 4 and Figure 1] "These findings suggest that it is not just price that is acting as a deterrent to cigarette use," notes Johnston. "There have been some underlying changes in important beliefs and attitudes, as well. These are the types of changes you might expect to result from shifts in the advertising mix, a greater amount of negative news coverage, or less favorable portrayals of smoking in entertainment programming."

There is also evidence from the study that cigarettes have become somewhat less available to teens. [Table 4] The proportion of 8th-graders saying that it would be "fairly easy" or "very easy" for them to get cigarettes, if they wanted some, has fallen from 77 percent in 1996 to 68 percent in 2001. Among 10th-graders, the proportion fell somewhat less, from 91 percent to 86 percent over the same time period. The investigators note, however, that the great majority of these young teens still say that they have ready access to cigarettes.

Will these favorable trends in cigarette smoking among young people continue? "The reductions in the numbers of teens who are smoking, or who are accepting of smoking, should help to deter other teens from starting," says Johnston. "But the fact that

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the proportion who judge smoking to be dangerous is no longer rising may be an early warning sign of a slowdown in the decline in teen smoking," he cautions.

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Monitoring the Future is funded under an investigator-initiated research grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Surveys of nationally representative samples of American high school seniors were begun in 1975, making the class of 2001 the 27th such class surveyed. Surveys of 8th- and 10th-graders were added to the design in 1991, making the 2001 nationally representative samples the 11th such classes surveyed. The sample sizes in 2001 are 16,800 8th-graders, 14,300 10th-graders, and 13,300 12th-graders, for a total of 44,300 students in all. They are located in 424 private and public secondary schools across the coterminous United States, selected with probability proportionate to size, to yield nationally representative samples of students in each of the three grade levels.

The findings summarized here will be published in the forthcoming volume: Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., & Bachman, J.G. (2002). *Monitoring the Future national results on adolescent drug use: Overview of key findings, 2001*. (NIH Publication No. [yet to be assigned].) Bethesda MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Established in 1948, the Institute for Social Research (ISR) is among the world's oldest survey research organizations, and a world leader in the development and application of social science methodology. ISR conducts some of the most widely-cited studies in the nation, including the Survey of Consumers, the National Election Studies, the Monitoring the Future Study, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the Health and Retirement Study, and the National Survey of Black Americans. Visit the ISR Web site at www.isr.umich.edu for more information.

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