

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Communities & Smoking

NATIONAL PREVALENCE AND TRENDS

The prevalence of tobacco use among LGBT populations has not been adequately examined. In fact, there is currently no research on tobacco use among transgender individuals. There is some evidence that suggests the smoking rate in some LGB communities may be twice that of heterosexual adults. Further research is needed to understand the prevalence of tobacco use and the risk factors that influence LGBT smoking behavior.

Adults

- Research indicates a wide range of smoking prevalence for LGB adults, ranging from 11% to 50%. ¹
- One poll found that 36% of respondents who self identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender were smokers; 25% who self identified as heterosexual smoke. ²
- Several factors such as higher levels of social stress, frequent patronage of bars and clubs, higher rates of alcohol and drug use, and direct targeting of LGB consumers by the tobacco industry may be related to higher prevalence rates of tobacco use among some LGB groups. ¹

Youth

- Smoking rates among LGB youth are estimated to be considerably higher (38% to 59%) than those among adolescents in general (28% to 35%). ¹
- Studies have shown that LGB youth are more likely to experience risk factors that contribute to substance use, such as low self esteem, alienation, and depression. ¹
- Analysis of tobacco marketing has demonstrated lesbian and gay youth as an emerging target community. ³

Industry Targeting

- Industry documents show tobacco companies' awareness of high smoking rates among sexual minorities, and marketing plans illustrate the companies' efforts to exploit the LGBT market. ^{1, 4, 5, 6}
- Tobacco companies promote specific brands to LGB populations through outdoors advertising, ads in gay-oriented magazines, nightclub promotions, and event sponsorships. ¹
- As one tobacco company document explains, "A large percentage of gays and lesbians are smokers. In order to grow the Benson & Hedges brand, it is imperative to identify new markets with growth potential." ⁴
- In 1994, a tobacco company conducted a study among gay men in San Francisco, which indicated that the "imagery among gay smokers is rooted in its position as a sophisticated and cosmopolitan brand that is appealing to/appropriate for both men and women. . . In contrast, although overtly masculine brands (such as Marlboro) are enduring due to their masculine cues, this more macho imagery can be a disconnect for the urban gay male who finds it to be hollow and a sign of sexual insecurity." ⁵
- In 1995, a tobacco company conducted a marketing plan called "Project SCUM" (Sub Culture Urban Marketing) targeting urban San Francisco populations, including LGBTs. ⁶

Smoking Cessation

- Compared with all adult smokers, more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender smokers believe smoking increases their risk of diseases such as lung cancer and heart disease. However, some research indicates that fewer LGBT smokers have made quit attempts (75% compared with 80% of all adults).²
- Another study found that fewer gay men (MSM) are former smokers than in a general-population cohort, and more quit attempts had been made in this group sample.⁷

SOURCES

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- 3 Washington, Harriet A. Burning love: Big tobacco takes aim at LGBT youth. *American Journal of Public Health* 2002;92:1086-1095.
- 4 Johnson, B. 'CEM's Gay and Lesbian Marketing Efforts.' Legacy Tobacco Documents Library. Philip Morris. October 9, 1997. Access Date: September 10, 2002. Bates No. : 2071145104. URL: <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/dup28d00>.
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- 6 RJ Reynolds. Project SCUM. Legacy Tobacco Documents Library. December 12, 1995. Access Date: October 19, 2002. Bates No. : 518021121/1129. URL: <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/mum76d00>.
- 7 Greenwood GL, Paul JP, Pollack LM, Binson D, Catania JA, Chang J, Humfleet G, Stall R. Tobacco use and cessation among a household-based sample of U.S. urban men who have sex with men. *Am J Public Health*. 2005 Jan;95(1):145-51.