

Kids lighting up

According to the federal government, nearly 3,000 American children and adolescents under age 18 become regular smokers each day. Of these, a third will die early from tobacco-related diseases.

Tobacco use causes about 1 in every 5 deaths in the United States. It is the main cause of preventable death and disease in the country. Almost 50 million Americans smoke, including 1 in 5 teenagers.

A study in the November 3, 1999, issue of *JAMA* reports that adults who experienced any of a number of

negative experiences during childhood were more likely to begin smoking at an early age and be current smokers. The researchers believe that helping to prevent these negative childhood experiences and treating children who are exposed to them may help reduce smoking among both adolescents and adults. The negative experiences studied included verbal, physical, or sexual abuse; having a battered mother; having parents who are separated or divorced; or growing up with a household member with substance abuse problems, mental illness, or who has been incarcerated.

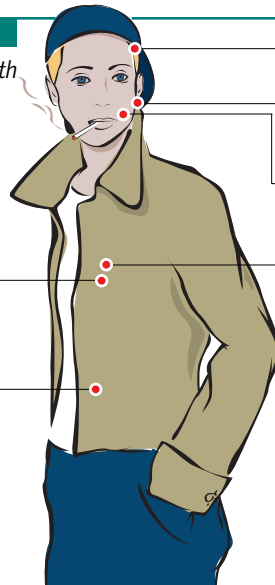
TOBACCO:

Tobacco is a highly addictive drug that contains thousands of dangerous chemicals. Of these, **nicotine** is the substance that causes smokers to become addicted to tobacco. Other substances that are especially harmful to the body include tar and carbon monoxide. Tobacco is especially dangerous for teens because their bodies are still developing and the chemicals in cigarettes may negatively affect their growth and development. Smokeless tobacco (also called chewing tobacco or snuff) and cigars are just as dangerous as cigarettes.

DANGERS OF SMOKING:

Use of tobacco is associated with an increased risk of:

- Cancer of the mouth, larynx, throat, esophagus, lungs, pancreas, cervix, uterus, and bladder
- Heart disease
- Stomach ulcers



- Addiction to nicotine
- Stroke
- Premature wrinkles
- Diminished sense of smell and taste
- More frequent colds and lung infections
- Chronic bronchitis
- Emphysema (a chronic disease in which the small air sacs in the lungs become damaged; it causes difficulty breathing)

THE LAW:

It is against the law in the United States to sell tobacco products to anyone younger than 18 years. All retailers are required to ask to see identification for those who appear to be younger than 27 years.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:

Set a good example for your children. If you smoke, quit. Talk to your children about the dangers of cigarettes and other tobacco products.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Food and Drug Administration 888/FDA-4KIDS (to report the sale of tobacco to a minor or to request information) or www.fda.gov
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information 800/729-6686 800/487-4899 (TTY) or www.health.org
- American Lung Association 800/LUNG-USA or www.lungusa.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm. Previous *JAMA* Patient Pages were published on ending tobacco dependence (September 1, 1999) and the dangers of secondhand smoke (December 9, 1998).

Additional Sources: Food and Drug Administration, National Cancer Institute, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, AMA's Encyclopedia of Medicine

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