

## Summary of Results of the 2008-09 Youth Smoking Survey

### Overview

Results from the 2008-09 Youth Smoking Survey (YSS), data collected during the 2008-09 school year, indicate that 3% of youth in grades 6-9 reported that they were current smokers, a figure unchanged from 2006-07 but up from 2% in 2004-05. For youth in grades 10-12 however, the 13% of youth who reported that they were current smokers was a statistically significant increase from 2006-07 when the rate was 11%. This was a reflection of an increase in current daily smokers and a concurrent decrease in puffers. This does not mean that more youth are smoking, rather that a higher percentage of youth have progressed along the smoking continuum to becoming current smokers. This is demonstrated in the fact that the prevalence of youth who reported that they had never tried smoking remained unchanged for both grades 6-9 (78%) and grades 10-12 (52%).

For the first time since the Survey's inception, students in grade 5 were not included in the Youth Smoking Survey. This was due primarily to the low smoking prevalence of this group as well as the challenges they found in completing the survey in the time allotted. For purposes of this survey, and in order to allow comparison for the younger grades, some information from the 2006-07 data was recalculated using grades 6-9 instead of 5-9. Tables for the previous surveys have not been adjusted.

History has shown that students in grades 6-9 differ from students in grades 10-12 on a variety of measures relating to tobacco use as well as other substances. Examples include the proportion of students reporting having tried a variety of tobacco products or alcohol and illicit substances, or access to cigarettes from retail sources increases with grade (i.e. age). Therefore, this summary reports on the two age groups separately rather than as a whole.

The reported mean age of smoking a whole cigarette for the first time was 12.1 years for youth in grades 6-9 and 14.1 years for youth in grades 10-12. The mean number of cigarettes smoked by daily smokers in grades 6-9 was 10.9 cigarettes per day and by daily smokers in grades 10-12, 9.0 cigarettes per day.

For grades 6-9, 22% of youth have ever tried smoking a cigarette. Males at 23% reported having tried cigarettes more often than females (19.5%). While 48% of youth in grades 10-12 have ever tried smoking a cigarette, there was no difference between males and females. More males (15%) reported being current smokers than females (11%) in grades 10-12.

### **Cigarillos/little cigars**

In previous surveys, cigarillos/little cigars were combined with cigars and pipes in the reporting of the use of tobacco products. For the first time, in 2008-09, cigarillos/little cigars were measured as a separate category.

For youth in grades 6-9, 10% had ever tried smoking cigarillos/little cigars. As with cigarettes, the higher the grade, the more the reported use and in grades 10-12, 35% of youth reported having ever tried cigarillos/little cigars. With respect to current use, 4% of all youth in grades 6-9 and 14% of those in grades 10-12 reported that they had used cigarillos/little cigars in the last 30 days. Males reported more ever and current use of this product than females for both grades 6-9 and 10-12.

Experimentation with cigarillos/little cigars is not unexpected among youth who have tried cigarette smoking. Of youth in grades 6-9 that had ever tried smoking cigarettes, 40% had also tried smoking cigarillos/little cigars. In grades 10-12, this rate was 60%. Of more concern were youth who had never tried smoking cigarettes that were trying these products. In grades 6-9, 1% of youth that had never tried smoking a cigarette had tried smoking cigarillos/little cigars, but for the higher grades, the rate was 11%.

### **Youth Smoking in the Provinces**

In 2008-09, the percentage of youth in grades 6-9 that had ever tried smoking cigarettes ranged from a low of 14% in Ontario to a high of 36% in Quebec. In grades 10-12, youth that had ever tried smoking cigarettes ranged from a low of 44% in Ontario to a high of 61% in Saskatchewan.

Comparing the prevalence of current smokers with 2006-07, there were statistically significant increases in Quebec, secondaire IV and V (17% compared to 11%) and Ontario grades 10-12 (12% compared to 10%). There were no other statistically significant changes observed.

## **Access**

Just over two thirds (67%) of youth in grades 6 to 12 who smoked in the last 30 days obtained their cigarettes from social sources (from friends or family, buy or get them from someone else, ask someone to buy for them). Social sources are most prevalent among smokers in grades 6-9, (85%), and decrease in the older grades, although a majority (60%) of youth smokers in grades 10-12 still reported getting their cigarettes from social sources. Experimental smokers were more likely to obtain their cigarettes from social sources (84%) than daily (49%) or occasional (63%) smokers. Likewise, females (76%) were more likely to use social sources than males (60%).

It should be remembered that youth have only two sources of tobacco products - retail and social. As youth get older and become more mobile, they are able to find retail sources willing to sell to minors. Until this occurs, social sources are the major sources.

## **Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use**

For 2008-09, the questions on alcohol and illicit drug use referenced last 12 month use as opposed to the previous surveys which focussed on ever use. As in that past, these questions are asked of youth in grades 7 to 12 and not of those in grade 6.

Experimentation with a number of substances is apparent among youth with the most commonly reported substances being alcohol, tobacco products and cannabis, in that order. Consistent with the patterns relating to tobacco use, reported use of alcohol, cannabis and all other drugs was higher among students in grades 10-12 compared with grades 7-9. As well, prevalence of last 12 month use of alcohol and of cannabis was higher among youth who have tried cigarette smoking than among those who have never tried smoking a cigarette, even a puff.

Although current smokers represented only 5% of youth in grades 7-9 and 13% in grades 10-12, 88% and 93% respectively of these youth reported that they had drunk alcohol in the last 12 months. In comparison, 20% of youth in grades 7-9 and 57% in grades 10-12 who have never tried smoking reported that they had drunk alcohol in the last 12 months.

Among youth in grades 7-9 who reported current cigarette smoking, 83% had used cannabis in the last 12 months, compared to the 4% of youth that had never tried smoking cigarettes. For youth in grades 10-12, among current cigarette smokers, 82% had used cannabis in the last 12 months, compared to the 17% of youth that had never tried smoking cigarettes.

**Acknowledgement**

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**Reference Information**

The YSS provides timely and accurate monitoring of the tobacco use in school aged youth (grades 6-12). YSS contributes an essential input to the development of sound and effective tobacco control policies and programs. The survey has been conducted in 1994, 2002, 2004-05, 2006-07 and 2008-009. The next survey is expected to be carried out during the 2010-11 school year.

For more information about the survey and/or its results, please contact Health Canada by email ([tcp-plt-questions@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:tcp-plt-questions@hc-sc.gc.ca)), by calling the toll free telephone number (1-866-318-1116), by fax (613-954-2377) or visit [www.gosmokefree.ca](http://www.gosmokefree.ca).

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## Terminology

**Current smoker**- has smoked at least 100 cigarettes in his/her lifetime, and includes the following:

1. **Current daily** - a current smoker who has smoked at least one cigarette per day for each of the 30 days preceding the survey.
2. **Current non-daily** - a current smoker who has smoked at least one cigarette during the past 30 days, but has not smoked every day .

**Former smoker** - smoked at least 100 cigarettes in his/her lifetime and has not smoked at all during the past 30 days.

**Experimental smoker** - has smoked at least one whole cigarette and has smoked in the last 30 days.

**Former experimental smoker** - has smoked at least one whole cigarette and has not smoked at all in the past 30 days.

**Puffer** - someone who has just tried a few puffs of a cigarette, but has never smoked a whole cigarette.

**Ever tried a cigarette** - someone who has ever tried a cigarette, even a few puffs.

**Never tried a cigarette** - someone who has never tried a cigarette, not even a few puffs.

**Smoking continuum** - progression of smoking from trying the first puff to the first whole cigarette, to becoming a current smoker.

**Prevalence of smoking** - the proportion of cigarette smokers in the target population.

**Amount smoked** - the average number of cigarettes smoked per day by daily smokers.

**Social Sources of cigarettes** - family/friend/someone gives them / take from family member / buy from friend or someone else / ask someone to buy them.

**Binge drinking** - an episode of drinking in which 5 or more drinks are consumed on one occasion.

**95% confidence interval** - This provides a range of values in which the estimated prevalence will fall 95% of the time (i.e. 19 times out of 20).