

What State Surveys Tell Us About Tobacco Use Among Alaska Natives: Implications for Program Planning

This fact sheet highlights findings related to tobacco use among socially or economically disadvantaged Alaska Natives, meaning people with less money or fewer resources than average. Sometimes this is called “low socioeconomic status (SES).” This information is intended to help people who are working to improve the health of Alaska Natives. The information can be used for planning effective programs and educating communities and their leaders about preventing youth from ever starting to use tobacco, helping current users to quit, and decreasing secondhand smoke exposure. Disadvantaged people often have fewer resources for support, and therefore are important to think about specifically when planning programs.

In state surveys, we assume people who report lower levels of education or income are relatively disadvantaged in comparison to those with high levels of income or education. Among youth, we focus on students who report getting mostly Cs, Ds or Fs because they may be less likely to pursue advanced education, and no information about their family income is available. These are the best options available for our analyses, but we recognize that it is an imperfect approach because some Alaska Native people with little formal education or money may have full access to resources and support in their communities.

Adult Tobacco Use

Current Cigarette Smoking

- Almost half of Alaska Natives with high school or less education currently smoke cigarettes (46% for less than high school, 49% for high school graduate/GED).
- This translates into about 24,500 adult smokers with high school or less education.
- More than half (55%) of Alaska Natives with a household income less than \$15,000 per year smoke cigarettes.
- In contrast, 21% of Alaska Native college graduates and 22% of those with \$75,000 or higher annual incomes are smokers.

Current Smokeless Tobacco Use

- About 13% of Alaska Natives with a high school diploma/GED currently use smokeless tobacco.
- This translates into about 5,400 smokeless tobacco users with high school or less education.
- About one in ten (13%) Alaska Natives with a household income of less than \$15,000 per year use smokeless tobacco.
- In contrast, 5% of Alaska Native college graduates use smokeless tobacco.
- About 3-4% of Alaska Natives with high school education or less use Iqmik, a form of homemade smokeless tobacco used only among Alaska Natives; 1% of college graduates use Iqmik.

Youth Tobacco Use

Current Cigarette Smoking

- More than half (59%) of Alaska Native high school students who get mostly Cs, Ds and Fs currently smoke cigarettes, significantly more than among students who get mostly As and Bs (31%).
- This translates into 1900 Alaska Native high school student smokers who get mostly Cs, Ds and Fs.

Current Smokeless Tobacco Use

- About one in four (23%) Alaska Native high school students who get mostly Cs, Ds and Fs currently use smokeless tobacco, which is similar to use among students who get mostly As and Bs (20%).
- This translates into about 730 Alaska Native high school student smokeless tobacco users who get mostly Cs, Ds and Fs.

Tobacco Use During Pregnancy

Cigarette Smoking

- About four in ten (41%) Alaska Native women with less than 12 years of formal education, and one in four (27%) women with 12 years of formal education, smoke cigarettes during the last three months of pregnancy.
- This translates into about 620 babies per year born to these women who smoke.
- In contrast, 15% of Alaska Native women with more than 12 years of formal education, and 5% of those with 16 or more years of formal education, smoke cigarettes during the last three months of pregnancy.

Smokeless Tobacco Use

- About one in five (19-21%) Alaska Native women with 12 years or less of formal education use smokeless tobacco during their pregnancy.
- This translates into about 400 babies per year born to these women who use smokeless tobacco.
- In contrast, about 8% of Alaska Native women with more than 12 years of formal education use smokeless tobacco during their pregnancy.

Preventing Tobacco Use

- Almost all (91%) Alaska Native high school students who get mostly Cs, Ds and Fs have ever smoked a cigarette.
- One in five (42%) of all Alaska Native high school students who get mostly Cs, Ds and Fs say that they smoked a whole cigarette before the age of 13.
- Among all Alaska Native high school students who get mostly Cs, Ds and Fs, one in four (24%) smoke cigarettes on school property and almost one in five (17%) use smokeless tobacco on school property.

Quitting Tobacco Use

- About half (55%) of Alaska Native smokers with less than a high school education say that they tried to quit during the past year.
- About one in four (27%) Alaska Native women with less than a high school education who smoke before pregnancy are able to quit by their last three months of pregnancy – but about two-thirds of them (64%) relapse and are smoking again after their babies are born.
- The clear majority (73%) of Alaska Native women with less than a high school education who smoke after pregnancy say that they want to quit.
- Almost half (49%) of Alaska Native smokers with less than a high school education know about the state’s toll-free tobacco Quitline: 888-842-QUIT (7848).

Exposure to Secondhand Smoke

Smoking Exposure at Home - Adults

- About one in five (18%) Alaska Natives with less than a high school education are exposed to secondhand smoke at home.
- This translates into about 2,900 adults exposed.

Smoking Exposure Indoors - Youth

- More than half (55%) of Alaska Native high school students who get mostly Cs, Ds or Fs report being exposed to secondhand smoke indoors at least weekly.
- This translates into about 1,800 youth statewide who are exposed to secondhand smoke indoors.

Knowledge and Opinions about Tobacco Control

- About 84% of Alaska Natives with less than a high school education believe it is very important to keep stores from selling tobacco to teens; 77% agree that tobacco use by adults should be banned on school grounds.
- About 42% of Alaska Natives with less than a high school education believe that there is little benefit to quitting after smoking for 20 years – which is not true.
- About 66% of Alaska Natives with less than a high school education believe that secondhand smoke is “very harmful”; 42% specifically know that exposure to secondhand smoke causes sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and 72% know that it causes heart disease.
- About 81% of Alaska Natives with less than a high school education support banning smoking in all indoor work areas.

More Information about Planning for Tobacco Control

This fact sheet includes highlights from the report *What State Surveys Tell Us about Tobacco Use among Alaska Natives: Implications for Program Planning*. The full report contains information about the health burden of tobacco use among Alaska Natives, trends in tobacco use among Alaska Natives in comparison to non-Native Alaskans, and additional detail about tobacco use indicators such as knowledge of harm, quitting, and opinions about tobacco control programs. Findings in the report are translated into recommendations for program planning.

A full copy of the report, an executive summary and additional fact sheets are available online from the Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program: www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/tobacco

DATA SOURCES: ADULT TOBACCO USE – ALASKA BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM (BRFSS), 2004-05 COMBINED; YOUTH TOBACCO USE – 2003 ALASKA YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY (YRBS); SMOKING DURING PREGNANCY – ALASKA PREGNANCY RISK ASSESSMENT MONITORING SYSTEM (PRAMS), 2000-03 COMBINED.

