Decline in Cigarette Use Among U.S. 8th and 10th Grade Students May Have Stalled

Although the use of cigarettes by high school students has been decreasing since the mid-1990s, the declining trend appears to be slowing, according to recently released data from the 2003 national Monitoring the Future survey. The percentage of 8th and 10th grade students who reported using cigarettes in the past 30 days dropped only 0.5% and 1% respectively from 2002 to 2003—decreases which were not statistically significant. Past 30-day use among 12th graders did exhibit a statistically significant decline during this period, from 27% to 24%. However, researchers “believe that this decline largely reflects an echo of the declines exhibited earlier when these students were in the lower grades” (p. 2). According to the study’s principal investigator, “we still have a quarter of our young people who are actively smoking by the time they leave high school, which is an unacceptably high rate for a behavior that so endangers their health and reduces their life expectancy” (p. 2).

Percentage of U.S. Eighth, Tenth, and Twelfth Grade Students Reporting Cigarette Use in the Past Thirty Days, 1991-2003

NOTE: The difference between the 2002 and 2003 prevalence rate for 8th and 10th graders was not statistically significant. The difference for 12th graders was statistically significant at p < .05.