After Several Years of Decline, Smoking Rates Among High School Students May Have Stalled

“[T]he national decline in youth smoking observed during 1997–2003 might have stalled,” according to a recent CDC analysis of data from the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (p. 725). While the prevalence of current cigarette use declined significantly from 36.4% in 1997 to 21.9% in 2003, there was no statistically significant difference in use from 2003 to 2005, which is consistent with trends observed in other national school-based surveys. According to the authors, factors that may have contributed to this lack of a continued decline include smaller annual increases in the prices of cigarettes, less youth exposure to and/or funding for smoking-prevention campaigns and programs, and substantial increases in spending by the tobacco industry on advertising and promotion. The authors note that “[t]he national health objective for 2010 of reducing current cigarette smoking among high school students to ≤16% . . . can be achieved only if the annual rate of decline observed during 1997–2003 resumes” (p. 726).

NOTE: The national Youth Risk Behavior Survey uses independent, three-stage cluster samples to obtain cross-sectional data representative of public and private school students in grades 9 to 12 in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey is an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire.


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