



Highlights

- These are the lowest cigarette use rates for middle and high school students ever recorded in North Carolina. Not only are they the lowest since the NC Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS) was first conducted in 1999, they are also lower than findings of a similar school health survey (YRBS) that has been collecting high school data since 1991. These rates are at an all time historical low, with significant declines noted from 2003 to 2005. The all-time recorded high for current high school cigarette use was 35.8% in 1997 (YRBS).
- In 2005, 27,000 fewer students [17,000 high school and 10,000 middle school] are current smokers than in 2003.
- Reported current cigarette smoking (past 30 days) among both middle and high school students dropped significantly since 2003. High school from 27.3% in 2003 to 20.3% in 2005. Middle school from 9.3% in 2003 to 5.8 in 2005.
- Middle school current cigarette smoking rates in 2005 (5.8%) are lower than the national average of 8.4% from 2004. From 1999 to 2005 the NC rates have decreased from 15.0% to 5.8%, whereas US rates have seen less decline from 9.2% to 8.4% between 2000 to 2004.
- The rate of decline for current cigarette smoking by teens is higher from 2003-2005 than it was from 2001-2003. This is likely the result of the multi-component efforts of the HWTF Teen Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Initiative. Specifically the 42 community-based HWTF granted programs that are now working across the state combined with the statewide media campaign has attributed to these declines.
- For 2005, the NC high school student current cigarette use rate is on par with the 2004 national rate (NC 20.3% vs US 21.7%). In 2003, the NC rates were higher than the national rates of 2002 (NC 27.3% vs US 22.5%).
- Nearly three-fourth (74.2%) of all middle school students and 45.7% of high school students have NEVER smoked, not even a puff. This has increased since 1999 from 60.7% in middle school and 31.8% in high school.
- Significant differences were also noted between males and females in any tobacco use by middle school students. Females (7.3%) were less likely than males (13.6%) to use any type of tobacco in the past month. A similar trend was noted with current smokeless tobacco use (females 1.3% vs males 4.1%) by middle school students. The trend stayed true for high school students with any tobacco, cigar and smokeless being used more by males than females.
- Significant decreases from 2003 to 2005 were noted among high school African American current cigarette smoking. In 2003, 20.1% of high school African American students were current smokers whereas in 2005, only 12.8% were current smokers.
- The survey coordination itself is a wonderful example of local, state and national agencies collaborating effectively to produce a high response rate and accurate data. Working with the NC Dept of Public Instruction, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, University of North Carolina-School of Medicine-Tobacco Prevention Evaluation Program, NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund, and NC Division of Public Health, YTS has effectively tapped into existing and on-going resources to make this effort a true success. With Safe and Drug Free School Coordinators providing the bulk of the on-ground survey administration, this is a shining example of extensive local and state collaboration. More than 6,000 middle and high schools students from 177 schools within 79 school districts participated. The response rate was one of the highest in the nation making the data more credible, reliable and representative. YTS is the largest statewide youth survey measuring tobacco use, knowledge and attitudes.

Lowlights

- Reported current use of smokeless tobacco has remained constant since 1999 among high school students. High school current use was 9.2% in 2005 and 9.5% in 2003. The NC high school student rate of 9.2% is higher than the national average in 2004 of 5.5%.
- Susceptibility (future intention or openness to smoking) among middle and high school students has remained steady. That means about one in five middle or high school students indicated they are open to trying tobacco in the future even they have never tried it to date.
- Lifetime and current cigar use has remained stable since 1999. However, most programmatic efforts to date have focused on cigarette smoking and to a less extent smokeless.
- Current and lifetime smokeless tobacco use has remained constant from 1999 among NC high school students. However, middle school students saw a decline of current smokeless use although the drop was not statistically significant. Only a small fraction of resources is committed specifically to smokeless efforts relative to teen cigarette smoking.

About the YTS:

Background- At the request of then Gov. Jim Hunt, in response to increasing rates of smoking by North Carolina high school students in 1997, NC Division of Public Health, Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (TPCB) conducted the first NC Youth Tobacco Survey in the fall of 1999. Since then TPCB has conducted four NC Youth Tobacco Surveys—every fall in odd numbered years (1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005). Nationally more than 45 states and DC have conducted at least one YTS or the equivalent for their state using CDC standard protocols and procedures. Since 1999, NC has seen positive changes in the expected direction related to prevalence. From 2003-2005 significant changes in current cigarette use by both middle and high students were observed. The statistically significant decreases mean that there was less than a 5% probability that these observed changes were the result of random chance.

Eighty school districts were selected as part of the sampling frame by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention working with Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch and the Department of Public Instruction. Seventy-nine school districts agreed to participate (98.8%). One hundred seventy-seven schools participated and completed surveys from more than 300 classrooms. This represents more than 6,000 middle and high school students who completed surveys. The overall response rate was 80% for both middle and high school, most of the students not participating were absent during the survey. North Carolina was among the top five in the nation in terms of participation and response rate.