



YOUNG PEOPLE AND SMOKING IN WALES

Children become aware of cigarettes at an early age. Three out of four children are aware of cigarettes before they reach the age of five whether or not the parents smoke¹.

Statistics about youth tobacco use in Wales:

- ✓ Most smokers start as teenagers, with children in Wales as young as 7 starting to smoke.²
- ✓ The average age at which people in Wales start to smoke is between 11 and 12 years.³
- ✓ Amongst Welsh 15 year olds, 23% of girls and 12% of boys report regular smoking⁴
- ✓ Of the 40 nations in the WHO Health Behaviour of School Age Children Survey only Greenland and the Russian Federation perform more poorly than Wales with respect to the number of 13 year old girls who smoke at least once a week.⁵
- ✓ Children whose parents or siblings smoke are more likely to become smokers themselves.⁶
- ✓ Tobacco use is a major contributor to, and a driver of, health inequalities across Wales. More than any other issue, tobacco use is responsible for the gap in life expectancy between the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged in our society.⁷

Young people in the ASH Wales Ffaith pilot programme surveyed other young people across the South Wales Valleys. 109 young smokers (28 males, 81 females) aged 11-17 years were surveyed in Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Blaenau Gwent between 1 June and 30 June 2008⁸.

- ✓ The average age they started to smoke is 11.2 years with some children indicating a starting age of as young as 7 years
- ✓ The average number of cigarettes smoked each week is 45 and in some cases up to 200 cigarettes per week
- ✓ 78% of those surveyed can buy cigarettes in local shops
- ✓ 20% of those surveyed can buy cigarettes from supermarkets

¹ Young people and smoking. Fact sheet 3. ASH <http://old.ash.org.uk/html/factsheets/html/fact03.html>

² Ffaith Youth Survey of young smokers aged 11-17 years in Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Blaenau Gwent between 1 June and 30 June 2008

³ Tobacco Smoking, Cannabis Use and Alcohol Use Research and Evaluation Branch Health Promotion Division Office of the Chief Medical Officer Welsh Assembly Government Accessed at http://www.hbsc.org/countries/downloads_countries/Wales/BR2_smoking%20alcohol.pdf

⁴ Smoking in Wales: current facts. Wales Centre for Health Nov 2007 accessed at <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/568/WCH%20smoking%20ban%20report%20E%20final.pdf>

⁵ Inequalities in young people's health: HBSC international report from the 2005/2006 Survey accessed at <http://www.hbsc.org/>

⁶ Lifetime parental smoking history and cessation and early adolescent smoking behavior .

Endy A. W. den Exter Blokland M.A., Rutger C. M. E. Engels Ph.D., William W. Hale, III Ph.D., Wim Meeus Ph.D. and Marc C. Willemsen Ph.D. *Preventive Medicine* Volume 38, Issue 3, March 2004, Pages 359-368

⁷ Smoking in Wales: current facts. Wales Centre for Health Nov 2007 accessed at <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/568/WCH%20smoking%20ban%20report%20E%20final.pdf>

⁸ Ffaith Youth Survey of young smokers aged 11-17 years in Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Blaenau Gwent between 1 June and 30 June 2008



- ✓ 80% can buy cigarettes off friends and family
- ✓ 1 in 5 can get cigarettes from vending machines
- ✓ 8% can buy cigarettes from ice cream vans and burger vans and private dwellings
- ✓ 81% can access single cigarettes through friends, family and in the school setting
- ✓ 7% can buy single cigarettes from shops or mobile vans – the sale of single cigarettes was outlawed in the UK in 1991.

Between 66-90% of adult smokers, begin smoking before they turn 18⁹. Virtually all smokers start before the age of 25¹⁰. Most smokers start, and are addicted, in adolescence. This is particularly concerning because early uptake of smoking is associated with heavier smoking patterns, a lesser likelihood of quitting, and a higher probability of becoming ill from a smoking related disease.

Tobacco smoking amongst young people is strongly associated with use of alcohol and other drugs, especially cannabis¹¹.

Attitudes to smoking amongst young girls in Wales

ASH Wales surveyed teenage girls aged between 13 and 18 from across Wales in 2009¹². This survey found that 35% were smokers and more than half are smoking 30 cigarettes or more a week, and over a third smoking in excess of 50 cigarettes a week. Some teenage girls are spending as much as £40-£50 a week on cigarettes and tobacco.

Other statistics from the survey found that:

- ✓ The average age at which teenage girls started to smoke was 12
- ✓ Nearly 70% of the teenage girls surveyed had tried to stop smoking but were not successful
- ✓ 19%, or nearly 1 in 5 were spending as much as £20 per week on cigarettes
- ✓ Almost a half (46%) felt staying slim was important to them
- ✓ 76% of their parents smoked and 68% of their mothers smoked

The overwhelming reason given as to why the girls started to smoke in the first place was because their parents or other family members and friends also smoked, with more than 60% stating this as the main reason.

Nearly 70% of the girls had tried to stop smoking but most stated that the addictive nature of cigarettes meant they were not able to quit their addiction. Problems at home, peer pressure, stress and anxiety were also cited as grounds for not being able to quit smoking successfully.

⁹ Smoking and drinking among adults. General Household Survey 2006. ONS, 2007 <http://www.smokefreeaction.org.uk/plain-packaging.html#7>

¹⁰ Hammond, D. 2005. Smoking behaviour among young adults: beyond youth prevention. *Tob Control* 14:181-185

¹¹ The Scottish Government. 2006. Towards a future without tobacco: The Report of The Smoking Prevention Working Group. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/11/21155256/2>

¹² Survey conducted by ASH Wales of 176 teenage girls aged 13-18 across Wales in November and December 2009.