

# CTUMS | CANADIAN TOBACCO USE MONITORING SURVEY

## SMOKING IN CANADA: YOUNG ADULTS

### Introduction

The Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) was developed to provide Health Canada and its partners with timely, reliable, and continual data on tobacco use and related issues. The survey's primary objective is to track changes in smoking status and amount smoked, especially for 15–24-year-olds, who are most at risk for taking up smoking.

These findings are based on interviews conducted by Statistics Canada between February and December 2003. This fact sheet focuses on young adults aged 20–24. It provides a summary of results on various topics addressed in the survey questionnaire for 2003 and includes the latest trends in smoking.

All CTUMS fact sheets and supplementary tables, representing four full years of data collection since February 1999, are available on Health Canada's Tobacco Control Programme website at [www.gosmokefree.ca/ctums](http://www.gosmokefree.ca/ctums).

### Trends in Smoking

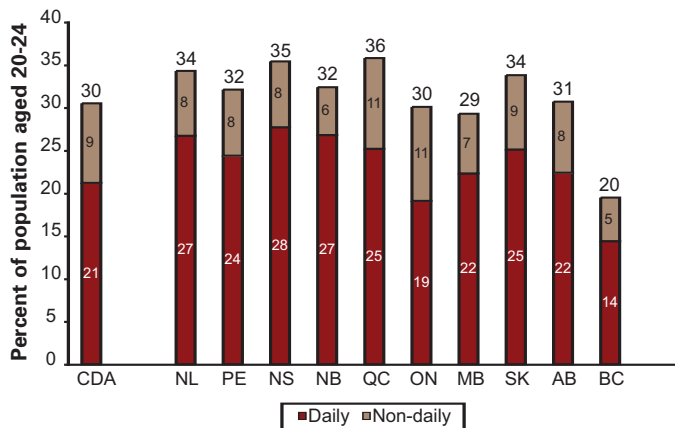
Historically, young adults aged 20–24 have had the highest rates of smoking as compared with rates for all other age groups in the Canadian population. In 2003, this trend continued: the prevalence of smoking for those aged 20–24 was 30% as compared with 21% for the entire population aged 15 and over. An estimated 21% of young adults were daily smokers, and the remaining 9% were occasional smokers (Figure 1).

Young adults shared the overall decreasing trend in smoking over time. In 1985, the smoking rate

for 20–24-year-olds was 43% — 13 percentage points higher than in 2003 and 8 percentage points higher than in 1999.

Within this young adult group, there was very little difference in smoking rates between males (31%) and females (30%) or between those aged 20–22 (31%) and those aged 23–24 (30%).

**Figure 1**  
Prevalence of smoking in young adults  
Ages 20-24, by province, Canada, 2003



Source: 2003 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey

Provincially, smoking rates for young adults aged 20–24 ranged from a low of 20% in British Columbia to a high of 36% in Quebec (Figure 1).

## Consumption of Cigarettes

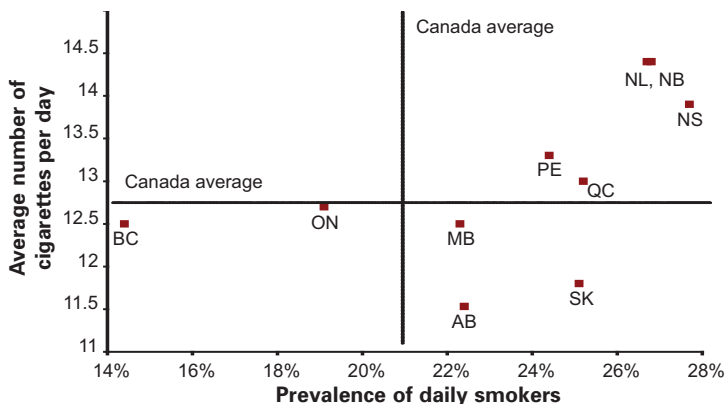
In 2003, daily smokers aged 20–24 averaged 12.7 cigarettes per day, somewhat less than the 15.9 cigarettes per day averaged by all daily smokers aged 15 and over. Males aged 20–24 smoked more (14.0 cigarettes per day) than did females (11.2 cigarettes per day).

Consumption has decreased considerably over time. For example, in 1985, young adult daily smokers averaged 17.5 cigarettes per day — 18.4 for males and 16.7 for females.

Figure 2 illustrates that both the prevalence of smoking and the amount smoked by young adult daily smokers were above the Canadian average in all of the Atlantic provinces and Quebec. Only British Columbia and Ontario were below the Canadian average for both measures.

**Figure 2**

**Smoking prevalence and amount smoked by young adults**  
Daily smokers aged 20–24, by province, Canada, 2003



Source: 2003 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey

## “Light” and “Mild” Cigarettes

An estimated 60% of young adult smokers aged 20–24 usually smoked “light” or “mild” cigarettes, including “extra” and “ultra” versions. A higher proportion of young adult females reported smoking these cigarettes (67%) as compared with young adult male smokers (54%). These results are much the same as for the smoking population aged 15 and over as a whole.

There is little evidence that young adults who smoked light or mild cigarettes believed that there were any positive health consequences as compared with smoking regular strength cigarettes. More specifically, 89% believed that smoking these cigarettes did not reduce

the health risks without having to quit. Ninety-one percent did not believe that smoking such cigarettes reduced the health risks as compared with smoking regular cigarettes. Eighty-four percent of young adult smokers said that they did not think that smoking light or mild cigarettes reduced the amount of tar inhaled.

## Smoking and Main Activity

Most young adults aged 20–24 reported their main activity over the previous year as either working at a job (50%) or being a student (41%).

Those young adults who worked had a higher prevalence of smoking (36% overall and 26% daily) than did students of the same age (21% overall and 13% daily). As well, employed young adults who were daily smokers consumed an average of 13.4 cigarettes per day versus only 10.7 for their student counterparts.

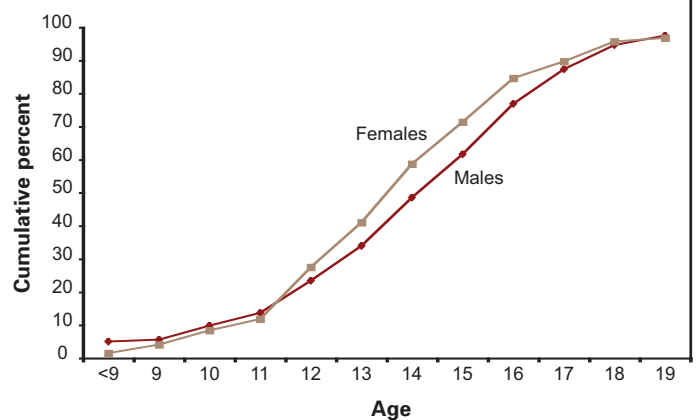
## Starting to Smoke

One measure of smoking experimentation is the age at which the first cigarette was smoked. As shown in Figure 3, about 25% of smokers aged 20–24 had their first cigarette before their teens, and 66% had smoked their first cigarette by age 15.

There was a very small difference between the ages when young female and male smokers tended to have their first cigarette (Figure 3). By age 15, 71% of female smokers aged 20–24 had tried smoking versus 61% of their male counterparts.

**Figure 3**

**Age of smoking first cigarette**  
Current smokers\* aged 20–24, by sex, Canada, 2003



Source: 2003 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey  
\* Current smokers = daily + non-daily smokers

## Former Smokers

In 2003, about 12% of young adults aged 20–24 were classified as former smokers. This proportion was much the same for males and females.

When these young former smokers were asked an unaided question on reasons why they quit, the most frequent response by far was “own health” (49%). Other responses with significant numbers were “cost” (23%) and “just wanted to quit/no reason” (20%).

CTUMS asked former smokers aged 20–24 who had quit smoking in the previous two years about various methods they may have used to help them quit. Thirty-three percent reported that they reduced their consumption as a strategy to quit, and 14% reported using the nicotine patch. The incidence of using other methods such as nicotine gum and hypnosis was relatively small. Of those who did not mention using any of the methods listed, 83% reported quitting on their own without special preparation or help.

## Trying to Quit

About 59% of young adult smokers aged 20–24 reported that they were seriously considering quitting in the next six months. Of these, 58% said that they were seriously considering quitting in the next 30 days. There was little difference in these quit intentions by sex.

Sixty-two percent of smokers aged 20–24 stated that they had tried to quit smoking in the previous two years.

## Young Smokers and Health Professionals

About 69% of 20–24-year-old smokers reported that they had seen a doctor in the previous year. Within this group, 43% said that they had been advised to reduce or quit smoking and, of these, 40% had been provided with information on quitting. Over half (57%) reported seeing a dentist in the previous year. Of these, 25% had been advised to reduce or quit smoking, and 22% of those receiving this advice had been provided with information on quitting.

## Survey Methods

**Objectives:** The Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) was initiated in 1999 to provide Health Canada with reliable data on tobacco use and related issues. The primary objective is to track changes

in smoking status and amount smoked, especially for those aged 15–24, who are most at risk for taking up smoking.

**Population Coverage:** The target population for CTUMS is all persons aged 15 and older living in Canada, excluding residents of Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories, and full-time residents of institutions. In addition, because this was a telephone survey, the 3% of Canadians without telephones are not included.

**Data Collection:** The results in this fact sheet are based on data collection that took place between February and December 2003. Statistics Canada conducted computer-assisted interviews by telephone; only direct reports (i.e., not third-party) with selected persons were accepted.

**Survey Design:** To allow provincial comparisons of approximately equal reliability, the overall sample size for the survey was divided equally across all 10 Canadian provinces. Information about household composition and second-hand smoke in the home was collected in 47,982 households. In half of these households, someone aged 15 or older was selected to provide information on smoking habits. This amounted to 21,300 individuals in 2003, about half of whom were aged 15–24. With this sampling frame, it is possible to estimate the smoking prevalence of Canadians aged 15 and older within about  $\pm 0.9\%$  each year. The margin of error will increase when estimating the prevalence of tobacco use for subgroups. A few questions were added to the questionnaire in July 2003, and the sample size for these was 10,741. The topics included age at which daily smoking began and use of marijuana.

The overall response rate, which takes into consideration the participation of both households and individuals, was 76% for the 2003 CTUMS data collection. Every telephone number called by Statistics Canada was fully accounted for in order to calculate the survey’s response rate accurately and to properly weight the data to represent the Canadian population.

**Microdata:** A microdata set containing the results of the survey is available for purchase from Statistics Canada. The public release of the data was announced on August 9, 2004, in Statistics Canada’s *The Daily*.

**Terminology:** A section containing definitions of the main terminology used in this fact sheet can be found at the following website location:  
<[www.gosmokefree.ca/ctums](http://www.gosmokefree.ca/ctums)>.