



## Highlights

The *Québec Survey of Tobacco Use in High School Students 2000* was the second in a series of biennial surveys aimed at monitoring smoking in young Québécois. In addition to producing precise data on the prevalence of smoking and the determinants of this unhealthy habit, this second survey measured changes in behaviours since the first survey in 1998. The survey was conducted by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* in the autumn of 2000 on 4,730 students (Secondary 1 to 5 inclusively) in 156 of Québec's public and private, French and English high schools.

### Smoking in Young Québécois — What the 2000 Survey Tells Us

Overall, 29% of high school students had smoked cigarettes in the 30 days preceding the survey.

- Nearly 19% of students were current smokers, this being defined as having smoked at least 100 cigarettes during their lifetime. Of these, daily smokers comprised 12.4%, occasional smokers 6.2%.
- 10.4% were beginning smokers, namely those who were experimenting with the habit. These young people had smoked fewer than 100 cigarettes during their lifetime.
- The majority of high school students (54%) were non-smokers, defined as those who had never smoked an entire cigarette.
- A small proportion of students were ex-smokers (2.5%), namely those who had smoked at least

100 cigarettes during their lifetime but had quit smoking.

- Nearly 15% were former experimental smokers, namely those who had smoked fewer than 100 cigarettes during their lifetime but who had not smoked in the 30 days preceding the survey.

### Smoking in High School Students Since 1998

Smoking among Québec high school students remained relatively unchanged since 1998. The rate was 29.0% in 2000, compared to 30.4% in 1998. These two rates did not differ significantly.

Although overall tobacco use did not vary since 1998, there was a change observed in the non-smoking group. The proportion of students who had never experimented with cigarettes increased. However, this increase was counterbalanced by a decrease in the proportion of former experimenters, namely those who had quit smoking before having attained the critical threshold of 100 cigarettes.

### Smoking by Grade Level

The smoking rate increased with the grade level. Between Secondary 1 and Secondary 5, the proportion of current smokers jumped from 5% to 28%, the greatest increase in smokers being seen between Secondary 1 and Secondary 2.

### Smoking by Sex

Current smokers comprised more girls than boys (22% v. 16%). Girls were also more likely to smoke daily than boys (15% v. 10%).

## **Quantity of Cigarettes Consumed**

On days which they smoked, 44% of high school students reported they smoked 2 cigarettes or less a day, 22% smoked 3 to 5, 20% smoked 6 to 10, and 14% smoked 11 or more cigarettes a day. The quantity of cigarettes smoked daily did not vary from that observed in 1998.

## **Tobacco Addiction**

The survey revealed that 25% of student smokers had their first cigarette of the day within 30 minutes of having woken up in the morning. The majority of these smoked daily.

## **Other Tobacco Products**

In the autumn of 2000, 14% of students reported having smoked a cigar in the 30 days preceding the survey. No difference was observed between this and the 1998 figure (13%). Other types of tobacco use, such as pipe smoking, chewing tobacco and snuff, were very rare in Québec high school students.

## **Social Influences — What the 2000 Survey Tells Us**

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### **Influence of Friends and Family**

Friends influenced smoking behaviours among high school students. The higher the number of friends who smoked, the more likely students were to smoke.

High school students perceived there is a very high prevalence of smoking in both young people their age and in adults. Nearly 60% thought that more than 41% of young people smoke; nearly 70% thought that over 41% of adults smoke.

The proportion of current smokers increased considerably if a brother or sister smoked (37% v. 15%).

Smoking in parents also influenced smoking rates among high school students. Irrespective of whether it

was the mother or father, the proportion of current young smokers increased from 14% to 24% when one of the parents was a smoker.

## **Access to Cigarettes**

In the autumn of 2000, slightly more than 18% of high school students under 18 years of age had tried to buy cigarettes in a store in the 30 days preceding the survey. Among them, 40% said they had never been refused purchasing cigarettes because of their age.

However, the data revealed that high school minors were using a variety of strategies to obtain cigarettes. Only 16% of student smokers said they obtained their supply exclusively by buying cigarettes themselves in a store; 26% said they obtained cigarettes by store purchases and from other sources, 21% exclusively from their friends, and 37% from several sources but not by buying them in a store.

## **Non-Smoking Activities in Class**

In the 12 months preceding the survey, 56% of high school students said that non-smoking activities had been held in their school and 37% had participated in at least one of these. The most common activity was the communication of information on smoking during a class; 40% of students stated this had occurred in their school and 80% of these had attended a class in which this activity had occurred.

## **Attitudes and Opinions Towards Smoking — What the 2000 Survey Tells Us**

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### **Reasons for Having Started to Smoke**

More than 80% of students reported curiosity as the reason for having begun to smoke. Having friends who smoke was the second most important reason, although it was mentioned by a relatively small proportion of students (36%). The third most reported reason was to “relax or reduce stress.”

Boys and girls cited similar reasons for explaining why they had begun to smoke. A very small proportion of

girls (8%) and boys (1%) indicated they had begun to smoke to keep their weight down.

### **Opinions on Smoking**

A high proportion of young people still saw benefits to smoking. More than 46% of high school students said that smoking cigarettes helped them feel more relaxed in social situations such as parties. Approximately 30% believed cigarettes contribute to making them appear “cool.”

Nearly 50% of young people who had smoked during the 30 days preceding the survey agreed with the statement that they would never become addicted to cigarettes. However, only 25% of this group agreed with the statement that they could quit smoking after having smoked a pack a day for a year.

### **Second-Hand Smoke**

Approximately 50% of high school students said that second-hand cigarette smoke bothered them. Non-smokers comprised the greatest numbers in indicating their discomfort with second-hand smoke.

In the context of being in an area where adults were smoking, 35% of students who said that second-hand smoke bothered them would often tell these adult smokers that their smoke was bothering them. This proportion fell to 26% when the smokers were young people their age.

In the autumn of 2000, nearly 37% of high school students reported having been in daily or almost daily contact with second-hand smoke in their home. The figure was 40% in 1998.

### **Attempts to Quit Smoking — What the 2000 Survey Tells Us**

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Approximately 20% of students had tried to quit smoking in the 12 months preceding the survey. This rate is similar to what was observed in 1998. 63% of young people who had tried at least once to quit smoking were current smokers; 20% were beginning

smokers, and 17% were non-smokers at the time of the survey.

High school smokers had frequently tried to quit smoking, but the period of abstinence was relatively short. Nearly 48% had abstained from smoking for 7 days or less, 20% had succeeded in not smoking for a little more than a week but less than a month, and 33% had not smoked for more than a month.

The majority of boys (93%) who had tried to quit smoking said they had not worried about gaining weight after quitting, whereas this proportion was 58% in girls.

Approximately 20% of smokers stated they intended to quit smoking in the 30 days following the survey; 31% said they intended to do so in the next 6 months.

### **Follow-up of this study ...**

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The use of cigarette among young people is a concern of public health because it acts of a product highly addictive. It is noted moreover, that the majority of the adult smokers started to smoke in their teens. In front of the effects of smoking on the public health, the ministry of Health and Social Services has adopted various actions to fight against this harmful practice. Among other things, it established this smoking monitoring survey among high school students. The base of this study is to document regularly and systematically the smoking habits of young people in order to follow smoking trends. The next study, the third of the series, is scheduled for the fall of 2002.