

Tobacco and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Communities

SMOKING PREVALENCE AND TRENDS

- The prevalence of tobacco use among LGBT populations has not been adequately researched. There is evidence that the smoking rate in some LGBT communities may be twice that of heterosexual adults. More research is needed to understand the prevalence of tobacco use and the risk factors that affect LGBT populations.

Adults

- Research indicates a wide range of smoking prevalence for LGBT adults, ranging from 11% to 50%.¹
- A recent poll found that 36% of respondents who self identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender were smokers as compared with 25% of all adults surveyed.²
- Several factors such as higher levels of social stress, frequent patronage of bars and clubs, higher rates of alcohol and drug use, and direct targeting of LGBT consumers by the tobacco industry may be related to higher prevalence rates of tobacco use among some LGBT groups.¹
- One study of gay and bisexual men from Portland, OR and Tucson, AZ resulted in a smoking rate of 48% and found that cigarette smoking was associated with other health and behavior factors including heavy drinking, frequent gay bar attendance, greater AIDS-related losses, and HIV seropositivity.³
- A study of cancer-related risk factors in women found higher rates of current and former smoking among lesbian and bisexual women than among women in general.⁴

Youth

- Smoking rates among LGBT youth are estimated to be considerably higher (38% to 59%) than for all adolescents during the same period (28% to 35%).¹
- Studies have shown that LGBT youth are more likely to experience risk factors which contribute to substance use, such as risk taking, rebelliousness, low self esteem, alienation, and depression.¹

INDUSTRY TARGETING

- The tobacco industry has targeted many different groups and LGBT populations are no exception. Industry documents show that tobacco companies were aware of high smoking rates among sexual minorities, and marketing plans illustrate the company's efforts to exploit the LGBT market.^{1,5,6,7}
- Tobacco companies target specific brands to LGBT populations through advertising both outdoors and in gay-oriented magazines, as well as through nightclub promotions, and event sponsorships.¹
- As one tobacco company document explains, "A large percentage of Gays and Lesbians are smokers. In order to grow the Benson & Hedges brand, it is imperative to identify new markets with growth potential."⁵
- In 1994, a tobacco company conducted a study among gay men in San Francisco which indicated that "B&H's [Benson & Hedges] imagery among gay smokers is rooted in its position as a sophisticated and cosmopolitan brand that is appealing to/appropriate for both men and women... In contrast, although overtly masculine brands (such as Marlboro) are enduring due to their masculine cues, this more macho imagery can be a disconnect for the urban gay male who finds it to be hollow and a sign of sexual insecurity."⁶
- In 1995, tobacco company conducted a marketing plan called "Project SCUM" targeting urban San Francisco populations including LGBTs.⁷

SMOKING CESSATION

- Although more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender smokers believe smoking increases their risk of diseases such as lung cancer and heart disease, fewer have made quit attempts (75% compared with 80% of all adults).²
- Of LGBT respondents who reported making a quit attempt, on average, they had tried and failed to quit smoking eight times, the same as all adults.²

SOURCES

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