



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Who's Still Smoking in the U.S.?

Cigarette Smoking Among Adults — United States, 2006

Recorded: November 6, 2007; posted: November 8, 2007

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds. Cigarette smoking is still the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States. Even though the percentage of adults who smoke has gone down in the past decade, a recent CDC study confirmed that there are still about 1 in 5 adults who continue to smoke. Although there are a growing number of options to help someone quit, success in quitting still eludes some smokers.

Dr. Corinne Husten, a researcher with CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, is here to discuss the latest findings on smoking among adults in the United States. Welcome to the show, Dr. Husten.

[Dr. Husten] Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Husten, what did your study find in terms of the number of people who say they smoke?

[Dr. Husten] We have 45 million Americans who currently smoke.

[Matthew Reynolds] How does that figure of 45 million that you just mentioned compare to the percentage that you've seen over, say, the past decade?

[Dr. Husten] We were seeing a decline in smoking since about 1995 until about two years ago, but it looks like it's been flattening out some the past year or so. We do have some concerns that that decline may be coming to an end.

[Matthew Reynolds] Well, given the number of health messages that are out there and the repeated health messages about how smoking is so bad for your health, how do you explain that.

[Dr. Husten] Well, we have to remember that the tobacco industry is still spending 13 billion dollars a year marketing their products. We also know that our state tobacco control program funding has been cut over the past several years, so that means they have not been able to run the media campaigns and other educational messages that can help kids not start or encourage adults to quit. We also know that many smokers are addicted, they want to quit, they try to quit but they don't necessarily know where to get help or the help may not be readily available to them. And finally, most smokers do

want to quit and they do make efforts, but unless the environment around them supports that effort, it's very very difficult for them to successfully quit, so we need to continue with the clean indoor air laws and the other environmental support that makes it easier for them to not smoke than to smoke.

[Matthew Reynolds] Even though smoking is less common than it once was, what have you learned about the prevalence of smoking among categories of people who still smoke?

[Dr. Husten] Well, we know that smoking rates are particularly high among American Indians and Alaskan natives and followed by African Americans and whites, among people with lower educational attainment, and with people living below the poverty level.

[Matthew Reynolds] What do we know about the health effects caused by smoking and the chronic diseases that are connected with smoking?

[Dr. Husten] Well, smoking harms nearly every organ of the body. So, for example, it causes lung and nine other cancers, heart disease, stroke and other arterial diseases, and respiratory disease, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. We know that half of all smokers who continue to smoke long term will die from a smoking related disease.

[Matthew Reynolds] If someone has been smoking for a long time or is a heavy smoker – or both – does it really matter if they quit? You just mentioned a litany of diseases that they could acquire from smoking. They may be asking themselves should I bother stopping?

[Dr. Husten] Well, the good news is, it's never too late to quit smoking. But it's also true that every smoker needs to quit as early in life as possible to minimize their chances of getting a smoking-related disease or to minimize the severity of the disease if they already have it.

[Matthew Reynolds] Well, tied to that question and that answer you just gave, what if someone who is a long time smoker already has heart disease or has breathing problems or perhaps has already developed cancer or early stage cancer from this? Is there any reason they should quit or is it just too late for them?

[Dr. Husten] Oh it's never too late. Even with people who have smoking-related diseases, quitting smoking confers major benefits in terms of decreasing the chances of their cancer reoccurring, decreasing the chances they'll have a second heart attack, or minimizing the shortness of breath and disability that they'll have with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

[Matthew Reynolds] I know people who smoke and who were able to quit “cold turkey” without too much trouble and other people who have used the gum or the patch to make it easier, but they still couldn’t quit. If someone tries to quit but is unsuccessful, is there a point to trying again? What would you tell them?

[Dr. Husten] They absolutely should keep trying to quit. Most people do try multiple times before they’re successful. The other thing is, if people that have tried and have been unsuccessful, we say definitely get help. Call 1-800-QUITNOW, talk to your doctor. The good news is there are more proven treatments now than ever before to help people quit. So, even if they’ve tried the patch or the gum, there are many other options available now and they need to try something else until they’re successful.

[Matthew Reynolds] You mentioned a 1-800 number that people can call for help. Is there a website that people can visit as well?

[Dr. Husten] Yes. People can go to www.smokefree.gov or to our website at www.cdc.gov/tobacco.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Husten, thank you so much for taking the time to share this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Husten] Thank you.

[Matthew Reynolds] That’s it for this week’s show. Don’t forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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