

High school grads less likely to smoke

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U.S. scientists have analyzed the correlation between high school completion and the two leading causes of preventable death: smoking and obesity.

Cornell University researchers, in what they describe as a groundbreaking study, used microdata from the 1979 National Longitudinal Study of Youth and found high school graduates significantly less likely to smoke than non-graduates and GED recipients.

"Many previous studies of the schooling-health link focus on general measures of health outcomes," said researchers Donald Kenkel, Dean Lillard and Alan Mathios. "Our study instead focuses on key health behaviors as specific pathways by which schooling can lead to differences in health outcomes. The results suggest completing high school yields large apparent health returns in the form of less smoking."

For example, 47 percent of male high school dropouts in the researchers' sample are current smokers, while smoking among males who finished high school is about 26 percentage points lower.

However, the researchers found little evidence that high school completion had an influence on weight. In fact, male high school graduates are about 7 percentage points more likely to be overweight, the researchers said.

The research appears in the Journal of Labor Economics.

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