

Smoking rate has plummeted in New York City

June 21 2007

New York City's smoking rate has plummeted since a comprehensive program against smoking was launched in 2002, according to findings issued today in the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR).

The 2006 rate was nearly 20% lower than the 2002 rate -- a decline that represents 240,000 fewer smokers. The City's rate for 2006 is the lowest on record (17.5%), and lower than all but five U.S. states (California, Washington, Idaho, Utah and Connecticut). Over the past year, smoking decreased among men (from 22.5% to 19.9%) and among Hispanics (from 20.2% to 17.1%). These large declines followed a year-long ad campaign aimed at prompting more smokers to quit. The new report is available online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/.

Beginning in 2002, and after a decade with no progress, New York City increased the tobacco tax, eliminated smoking in virtually all workplaces, and launched hard-hitting anti-tobacco ads. By all indications, the interventions have made a difference. "Hard-hitting ads work," said Health Commissioner Dr. Thomas R. Frieden -- "especially when they're paired with a tobacco tax and smoke-free air legislation. With nearly a quarter of a million fewer smokers, New York City is leading the way on tobacco control. There aren't many programs that can prevent 80,000 premature deaths this quickly."

Ads from the 2006 campaign graphically depicted tobacco smoke's effects on the brain, lungs and arteries, showing testimonials from sick

and dying smokers and their children, including former smoker Ronaldo Martinez, who now breaths through a hole in his throat as a result of smoking-related cancer. In a separate recent survey, nine out of 10 smokers said they saw the ads -- and half of smokers said the ads made them want to quit.

Highlights in Smoking Declines Since 2002

- The smoking rate fell faster among women (23% decline) than among men (15% decline).

- Rates among young adults (ages 18-24) have declined twice as much as rates among other adult age groups

- Among all ethnic groups, Asian New Yorkers have made the most progress, with a 30% decline in the smoking rates, though Asian males still smoke at a rate of 16.4%

- Smoking rates on Staten Island have declined by only 0.4% since 2002, while the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens have seen declines of more than 20%

“In spite of great progress, we have much farther to go, said Dr. Frieden. “More than 1 million New Yorkers are still smoking, and nearly 9,000 are dying from smoking-related disease every year. Because of inflation, the real price of cigarettes has declined by more than 60 cents since the last increase of the tobacco tax in New York in 2002; the time is right for another increase in the cigarette tax.”

Source: New York City Health Department

Citation: Smoking rate has plummeted in New York City (2007, June 21) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-06-plummeted-york-city.html>

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