

New report on smoking shows who's quitting, who's not

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Quitting smoking is not easy, but thousands of New Yorkers succeed at it every year. Who's trying to kick the habit, and who's succeeding" In a new report titled Who's Still Smoking, the Health Department sheds light on both questions. The report, based on a large survey of New York City adults, shows that two thirds of the city's smokers – almost 800,000 adults – tried to quit in the past year, but only 17% of those succeeded.

Data from the survey identify emotional distress and binge drinking as possible obstacles to quitting, and finds that less than a fifth of New York City smokers are using nicotine replacement therapy – even though it doubles the chances of success. The report is available online at www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads ... rvey-2007smoking.pdf .

New York City has 240,000 fewer smokers today than in 2002, but cessation rates vary widely by borough. Staten Island's smoking rate has held steady since 2002, even as the citywide rate has dropped by 20%. Some 27% of Staten Island adults still smoke, the report shows, compared to 17.5% citywide. In comparison, the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens, have all seen declines of more than 20%.

The Health Department today announced a nicotine-replacement giveaway specifically for Staten Islanders. Patches, gum and other medications can double smoker's chances of quitting, but only 19% of smokers tried the patch in the past year, and only 3% tried oral medications like Zyban. The five-week giveaway will take place on Tuesdays through Thursdays beginning today, August 21, and will run

through September 20 at the Staten Island Ferry's Whitehall Terminal. The Health Department is also planning a targeted anti-tobacco media campaign and a qualitative study to determine why smoking is so widespread and persistent on Staten Island.

The new report also shows that men smoke more than women in New York City (20% versus 15%) but that both sexes are quitting at similar rates. Black and Hispanic smokers are more likely than whites to try quitting, the report shows, but less likely to succeed.

Smoking is an expensive habit, costing the average pack-a-day smoker \$2,500 a year. Not surprisingly, 68% of low-income smokers (versus 60% of high-income smokers) report having tried to quit during the past year. Yet data show that poorer New Yorkers are less likely to succeed. Survey data also indicate that attempts to quit smoking also vary by education level. New Yorkers without a high school education are more likely to try to quit than those who have a college degree (70% versus 62%), but they succeed at a lower rate (14% vs. 20%).

A separate analysis of survey data points to several factors that may undermine attempts to stop smoking. Mental distress hampers success, the findings suggest, with distressed smokers quitting at a lower rate than others (12% versus 18%). Likewise, only 11% of binge drinkers succeeded in the attempts to quit, compared to 18% of non-binge drinkers. Studies suggest that, for many smokers, alcohol is a strong cue to light up.

All data in this report and this release come from the Health Department's Community Health Survey, an annual, random-digit-dial telephone survey of 10,000 New York City adults. The survey provides a wide range of data on the health of New Yorkers. All data are self-reported.

Source: New York City Health Department

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