

Smoking, teens and their parents: New research

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A new study found that adolescents were at the greatest risk of smoking when their parents began smoking at an early age and the parents' smoking quickly reached high levels and persisted over time.

The study, published in the November issue of *Health Psychology*, draws from the long-running Indiana University Smoking Survey and builds on previous research that suggests smoking behavior is influenced by both genetics and the environment.

"This particular study focuses more on the genetic influence in the specific case of a parent's smoking behavior impacting a teenage son or daughter's smoking," said Jon Macy, project director of the IU Smoking Survey in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. "The study findings suggest that the characteristics of early onset and high levels of long-term smoking are great candidates for behavioral and molecular genetic studies of the causes of smoking and how smoking behavior is passed from one generation to the next.

"Of course, environmental influences on adolescents such as parenting practices, availability of cigarettes in the home, and parents' attitudes about smoking are equally as important and can be addressed with effective public health interventions including family-based smoking prevention programs."

Previous studies, many of which relied on parents' current smoking status only, offered mixed results about whether parental smoking is

predictive of adolescent smoking. The current study, however, used longitudinal data to identify more detailed information about parental smoking behaviors such as amount of smoking, speed of escalation, peak of use and persistence over time.

The IU Smoking Survey, a 28-year longitudinal study of the natural history of cigarette smoking, is the longest running study of its kind. Researchers began collecting data in 1980 from middle and high school students in Monroe County, Ind. Researchers continue to collect data from participants and have now started surveying their children.

"This study used a more informative description of parental smoking behaviors," Macy said. "We've found that these descriptions might do a better job than current parental smoking status of predicting risk of their adolescent children starting to smoke."

Source: Indiana University

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