

School attendance, refusal skills combat smoking risk in youth

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Asian-American youth are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. Although Asian Americans begin smoking later in life, they are more likely to smoke regularly and at a higher rate than other ethnic or racial groups, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. Now, a University of Missouri researcher is examining the unique differences in adolescent tobacco use among Asians and other groups to provide specific recommendations for prevention and treatment.

"Given the large number of addicted teenagers, tobacco control programs tailored to [youth](#) should be a high priority," said ManSoo Yu, an assistant professor in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. "Programs for teens are crucial because of the devastating health consequences of [smoking](#). Moreover, the cost of [smoking cessation](#) programs for adults is more expensive than those for youth."

Prevention efforts are especially important, considering that Asian Americans who smoke regularly smoke more than people from any other racial or ethnic group. There is a 300 percent increase in smoking among Asian Americans ages 12-17 compared to those age 18 years and older.

In the study, Yu analyzed data from the National Youth Tobacco Survey to find underlying factors related to smoking patterns of Asian Americans. Yu found that youths who frequently were absent from school were more likely to smoke or engage in health-risk behaviors.

"School truancy is a strong predictor of all stages of smoking intensity: experimental, occasional and regular smoking," Yu said. "It is important that parents and teachers collaboratively manage absenteeism and identify students' reasons for missing school. Truancy is often a response to trouble at home or school. Programs that enhance commitment and accountability to academics can decrease youth vulnerability to risk behaviors."

Asian Americans who have parents and other family members that smoke are more likely to smoke. The findings also indicate that demonstrating refusal to smoke is related to non-smoking in teens.

"Asian teens prioritize group memberships as more important than individual self-interests," Yu said. "Increasing refusal assertiveness can help youth avoid smoking. Programs should focus on teaching refusal skills to all teens because peer smoking is a strong predictor of smoking, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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