

Cigarette taxes 'Disproportionately burden' the poor, report says

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Found low-income smokers spent 25% of income on the habit, compared with only 2% among those better off.

(HealthDay)—New research finds that high cigarette taxes take a heavy toll on low-income smokers, compared to those who are wealthier.

In a study, researchers at RTI International found that poor [smokers](#) in New York state—which has the country's highest state cigarette tax at \$4.35 a pack—spent about 25 percent of their [household income](#) on cigarettes. Nationally, the average spending was about 14 percent.

By contrast, the richest smokers nationwide and in New York spent about 2 percent of their household income on cigarettes.

"Excise taxes are effective in changing smokers' behavior," study author Matthew Farrelly, chief scientist and senior director of RTI's [public](#)

[health policy](#) research program, said in an RTI statement. "But not all smokers are able to quit, and low-income smokers are disproportionately burdened by these taxes."

Despite the high taxes in New York state, the study found that the percentage of people with incomes under \$25,000 who smoked didn't decline from 2003-2004 to 2009-2010.

"Special efforts are needed to reduce smoking among those with low incomes," Farrelly said. "States, especially New York, generate significant revenue from cigarette taxes, but only a small percentage of that money is used for tobacco control programs. It seems only fair that states with high cigarette taxes should adequately fund cessation interventions for low-income smokers who shoulder a disproportionate share of cigarette taxes."

The researchers relied on surveys of more than 13,000 people.

The study, funded by New York State Health Department, appeared Sept. 12 in the journal [PLoS One](#).

More information: For more about [smoking](#), try the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

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