

US adult smoking rate falls to new low

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CDC says less than 17 percent are lighting up, but big gap remains between well-off and poor.

(HealthDay)—Fewer Americans smoke than a decade ago, and those who still light up do so less often, federal health officials reported Thursday.

Less than 17 percent of adults said they smoked in 2014, down from nearly 21 percent in 2005, a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report reveals.

And the average number of cigarettes smoked daily fell from nearly 17 to fewer than 14 by 2014.

Smoking still kills half a million Americans every year, the report found. But the findings still suggest that public health efforts to rein in smoking are yielding results.

"There's a lot of encouraging news in these most recent national smoking estimates," said lead investigator Brian King, deputy director for research translation at the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health in Atlanta. "But big socio-economic disparities remain, and are fairly consistent with what we've seen in the past."

For example, investigators found that [smoking rates](#) among uninsured adults and poor Medicaid recipients were twice that of people with private insurance or seniors on Medicare.

Those with only a [high-school](#) degree and non-whites also were far more likely to smoke than better-educated adults and/or whites, the researchers found.

Investigators found that adult smoking fell a full percentage point—to 16.8 percent—between 2013 and 2014 alone.

And among the privately insured and those with Medicare, rates were as low as 12 percent to 13 percent, the report found.

By contrast, rates hit roughly 28 percent to 29 percent among the uninsured and Medicaid enrollees, with similar numbers among multi-racial Americans, Native Americans and the very poor. Among those with only a [high school education](#), 43 percent were found to smoke.

The latest numbers appear in the Nov. 13 issue of the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

Although the survey focused exclusively on adults, King said other recent data suggest that a little more than 9 percent of U.S. high school students smoke cigarettes.

Overall, the broad decline is considered progress toward achieving the

national "Healthy People 2020" goal of bringing smoking rates down to 12 percent or less within five years.

"Interventions like increasing the price of tobacco and the passage of comprehensive smoke-free laws at both the state and local levels have made a difference," King said. Mass-media education campaigns led by the CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have also contributed to dropping smoking rates, he added.

But as cigarette smoking falls, other forms of tobacco use are rising, King said. "We're seeing increases in the use of e-cigarettes and hookah use, particularly among American youth," he said.

"Going forward, we really need to carefully look at how all the different tobacco products are being used, and make sure we're not simply playing a game of whack-a-mole," he said, referring to the mallet-defying rodents in the well-known game.

"There's a lot more we need to do to address the disparities in smoking rates that particularly affect the most vulnerable populations, such as those below the poverty line, those with a lower education and those who remain uninsured," King added.

Dr. Gregg Fonarow, a spokesman for the American Heart Association and a professor of cardiology at the University of California, Los Angeles, welcomed the findings but expressed some reservations.

"Over the last 50 years, the rate of adult men and women who have smoked has declined more than half, now reaching a record low of below 17 percent," he said. This important [public health](#) success has contributed to substantial declines in premature death due to heart disease, stroke, lung disease, and cancer, he pointed out.

Nevertheless, cautioned Fonarow, "millions of men and women still smoke in the U.S., putting their lives at risk. More work is needed to address this, particularly among vulnerable populations who disproportionately continue to smoke."

More information: There's more on national smoking goals at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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