

US smoking rates differ by county, not just state

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(HealthDay)—Parts of the Midwest and South have the highest smoking

rates in the United States, a new study finds.

The analysis of national survey data showed that nearly 25 percent of residents light up in West Virginia and Kentucky. Next in the tobacco lineup are Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio and Mississippi.

However, counties with the highest [smoking](#) rates were not always in states with the highest smoking rates, according to researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"We were struck by the great variation in county-level cigarette smoking patterns across the United States," said Zahava Berkowitz. She is a statistician with the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

"We have known about the state-by-state variation for some time, but it is important to hone in on county-level variation to have a more fine-grained picture of the geographic variability. County-level estimates can help identify areas where targeted tobacco prevention and control interventions may be warranted," Berkowitz explained.

The researchers also found that the highest rates of former smokers were in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Florida.

Information about percentages of former smokers "is important because some former smokers may benefit from [lung cancer screening](#)," Berkowitz said.

Utah had the lowest number of current and former smokers, the findings showed. Counties with the lowest rates of current smokers were in Utah and California.

The study results were published Oct. 3 in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*.

"Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of disease, disability and death in the United States. Each year, nearly half a million American adults die prematurely from cigarette smoking or exposure to secondhand smoke," Berkowitz said in a journal news release.

The estimated cost of smoking-related medical care and loss of productivity in the United States is more than \$300 billion a year, she said.

More information: The American Cancer Society offers a [guide to quitting smoking](#).

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