

Regular smoking in young people at record low

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Credit: Cancer Research UK

The proportion of young people smoking in England regularly is the lowest on record, according to [new figures](#) .

But there are signs that falls in recent years are levelling off, with the proportion of [young people](#) who have ever tried a cigarette similar to figures in 2014.

Around 1 in 5 (19 percent) 11-15 year olds surveyed said they had ever smoked, a similar level to [survey data from 2014](#) . Around 3 percent of young [people](#) said they were regular smokers, down slightly from 2014.

This follows a period of sharper decline since 1996 when around half (49 percent) of young people surveyed said they had ever smoked.

Alyssa Best, tobacco policy advisor at Cancer Research UK, said that efforts to reduce [smoking rates](#) need to continue.

"We urge the government to prioritise tobacco control so we can achieve the goal of a 'smokefree generation'," she said.

The figures come from a survey of secondary pupils in England, carried out regularly since 1982. More than 12,000 pupils in 177 schools completed questionnaires in the autumn term of 2016.

Around half of pupils who had ever smoked said that they had only tried [smoking](#). The remaining half was split fairly evenly between regular, occasional and previous smokers.

The proportion of pupils who had ever smoked increased with age, from 4 percent of 11 year olds to 36 percent of 15 year olds. Girls (20 percent) were more likely to have tried smoking than boys (18 percent).

"This continued decline in regular youth smoking has been made possible by effective [tobacco control](#) measures over the years, such as tax rises to make tobacco less affordable, and standard packs to make cigarettes less desirable," said Best.

Since the survey began, the minimum age to buy [tobacco products](#) was raised from 16 to 18 in 2007. A ban on smoking in public places, on the display of [tobacco](#) products in shops, and the mandatory inclusion of

large health warnings on packaging were introduced.

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of campaign group Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), said that while the figures are positive more needs to be done.

"The Tobacco Control Plan must be fully implemented and adequately funded if we are to succeed in tackling the burning injustice that those born poor die on average nine years earlier," she said.

The survey found that regular youth smokers consumed around 26 cigarettes on average, down from around 44 in 2007.

The proportion of pupils saying they had ever used e-cigarettes increased from 22 percent in 2014 to 25 percent. 2014 was the first year this information was first recorded in the survey.

Levels of current and regular e-cigarette use remain low but have increased from 4 percent to 6 percent, and from 1 percent to 2 percent respectively since 2014.

Arnott said it was reassuring that experimentation with electronic cigarettes remains low and doesn't appear to be leading to regular use.

Some have expressed concern over the possibility that e-cigarettes will lead to people taking up smoking conventional cigarettes. Recent research has shown that while teens who vape might be more likely to try cigarettes, most young people who try e-cigarettes don't become regular users.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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