

UK Tobacco controls a success in cutting smoking among adolescents

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Cigarette smoke damages DNA within minutes after inhalation. Credit: iStock

A new study, published today, reveals a significant drop in the number of young people taking up smoking over the last 20 years, as the UK has introduced a range of tobacco controls.

However research findings also show inequalities in starting smoking across different economic backgrounds, despite these regulations.

The figures, taken from the period between 1990 and 2012, show a fall of 50% in the numbers of 15 years-olds who try smoking for the first time, and around a 50% decrease in the likelihood of [young people](#) progressing to becoming occasional or daily smokers after initiation.

But the Medical Research Council (MRC) funded study showed that young people from less economically developed backgrounds are still more

than twice as likely to experiment with smoking, and more likely to become daily smokers than those whose parents were better off.

Michael Green, Pre-Doctoral Fellow at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow, and lead researcher on the project, said: "We tracked the chances of young people starting smoking across the UK over the past two decades and during this period of tightening tobacco controls, we found that young people had become less likely to try cigarettes or establish a daily smoking habit. This leads us to believe that the overall strengthening of [tobacco control](#) measures has had a health-promoting effect among younger people.

"However, these findings also reveal that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are still more likely to become smokers and to start smoking earlier in life, a pattern that was consistent across the period we were investigating.

"Whilst the decreasing use of cigarettes by young people in the UK is certainly good news, more needs to be done to reduce the inequalities in smoking take-up and prevent smoking among the most disadvantaged young people before it becomes an established habit that is difficult to quit."

The UK is recognised as having one of the most comprehensive tobacco control policies in Europe having, over the last 20 years, adopted new laws such as tax increases and bans on advertising tobacco products and smoking in public places.

The data was taken from over 5,000 adolescents, aged 11-15, who were interviewed on their [smoking](#) habits as part of the UK Household Longitudinal Study between 1994 – 2008 with imputed and retrospective data expanding this to cover a period between 1990 and 2012.

The report is published today in the *BMJ's Tobacco Control* journal

More information: "Socioeconomic position and early adolescent smoking development: evidence from the British Youth Panel Survey (1994–2008)."

Tob Control [DOI:](#)

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