

QUITTING SMOKING AND NON-NATIVE ALASKANS OF LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM PLANNING

This fact sheet highlights findings related to tobacco use among non-Native Alaskans who are socially or economically disadvantaged, meaning people with less money or fewer resources than average, or those with “low socio-economic status” (SES). This information is intended to help people who are working to improve the health of all Alaskans, especially those who face the dual burden of tobacco use and poverty. The information can be used for planning effective programs and educating communities and their leaders about preventing youth from ever starting to smoke, helping current users to quit, and decreasing secondhand smoke exposure. Disadvantaged people often have fewer resources for support, and therefore are important to think about specifically when planning programs.

For this study, we focused on 2004-2006 Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey respondents ages 25-64, living at 185% of poverty level or lower, based on household income and household size, as well as those who report having less than a high school education. We focused on non-Native Alaskans because a comprehensive report and fact sheets about Alaska Natives and tobacco use are already available online at <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/tobacco/>. Twenty-one percent of non-Native Alaskans were considered low SES using our definition.

Adult Tobacco Use and Quitting Smoking

Current Cigarette Smoking

- Over one third (37%) of non-Native Alaskans of low SES smoke.
- The odds of being a current smoker are more than double among low SES persons compared to higher SES persons (OR 2.1, 95% CI: 1.8 - 2.6)—*after* adjusting for age, gender, marital status, employment status, children in the household, urban/rural and regional factors.
- Starting smoking at an early age increases the likelihood that a person will continue smoking and it increases the risk of disease and death from tobacco-related causes; over two thirds of low SES current smokers (69%) started smoking regularly before age 18.

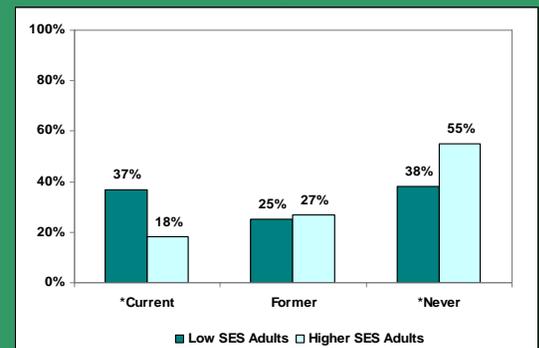
Quit Attempts

- Four out of five low SES current smokers want to quit, and 3 out of 5 (61%) have made a quit attempt in the past year.
- One out of four low SES persons who smoked in the last 5 years successfully quit smoking.
- Although low SES smokers are more likely than higher SES smokers to want to quit and to have tried to quit, they are not as successful in quitting in the long term, resulting in higher smoking prevalence for the low SES population.

Getting Help in Quitting

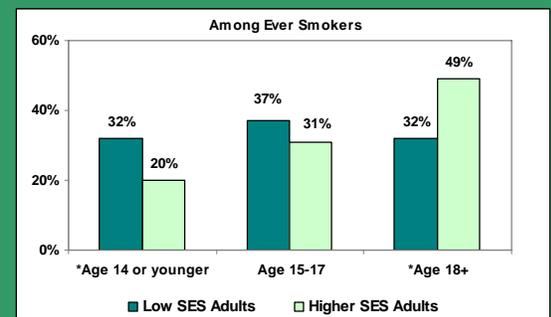
- Persons of low SES are less likely than persons of higher SES to be asked about smoking or advised to quit by a doctor or nurse within the past year, mainly because almost 1 out of 3 did not have a health care visit in the past year.
- Among low SES smokers who made a quit attempt, only 3 out of 10 (27%) used Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), including nicotine patches or gum and other medications. NRT has been shown to be an effective method for improving the success of quit attempts.
- Less than half of low SES smokers (47%) are aware of Alaska’s Tobacco Quit Line, a free telephone service that provides counseling and medications to help people to quit tobacco.

Current Adult Cigarette Smoking



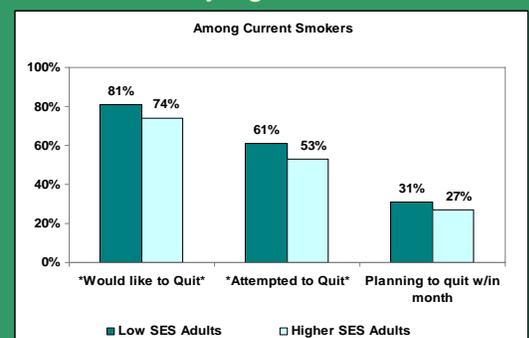
Source: Alaska BRFSS 2004-2006

When did you start smoking regularly?



Source: Alaska BRFSS 2004

Trying to Quit



Source: Alaska BRFSS 2004-2006

* indicates significant difference (p < 0.05)

Who Among Non-Native Low SES Alaskans is Most Affected?

Current Cigarette Use

- Smoking prevalence is highest among men, those who are unable to work or are unemployed, those without children in the home, unmarried people, and those who are divorced or separated.
- Smoking prevalence is high across all age groups and regions in Alaska.

Quit Attempts

- Interest in quitting was high among all persons of low SES (81%), and highest among those with children in their home (88%).
- Those who smoke daily are less likely than those who smoke only on some days to have made a quit attempt in the past 12 months (56% vs. 76%).
- Quit attempts are more likely among those unable to work (74%), but less likely among others not in the workforce, including homemakers, retirees and students (44%) and among smokers without children in the home (51%).

Getting Help in Quitting

- Among persons of low SES who saw a health care provider in the past year, those living in rural areas and those in the Gulf Coast region (Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak boroughs; Valdez-Cordova census areas) are less likely to be asked about smoking or receive advice about quitting.
- Use of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) to increase the chance of a successful quit attempt is low across all groups.
- Knowledge of Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line was low across all groups.

Supporting Successful Quitting

- Low SES smokers are less likely to quit successfully than higher SES smokers; a comprehensive approach to tobacco prevention and cessation should address disparities that affect the ability to quit, such as early initiation of smoking and less access to regular health care.
- Improving access to Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), to health care, and increasing awareness of Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line may increase cessation among low SES Alaskans.
- Tobacco prevention and control public awareness campaigns should be tailored to people of low SES, using appropriate actors and models and relevant channels of communication.
- Health care providers as a group can play a key role in promoting and supporting tobacco cessation and encouraging smoke-free homes; many providers may need training and support to provide effective cessation counseling and medications (NRT).
- Additional research should be conducted to identify motivation strategies and messages to better assist low SES smokers in quitting and to encourage use of tools that can help people quit, such as NRT and counseling, including the free telephone-based counseling in conjunction with Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) that is offered through Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line.
- Additional research could help identify key social and occupational barriers and supports that affect successful quitting among low SES smokers.

More Information about Planning for Tobacco Control

This fact sheet includes highlights from the report *Smoking Behavior and Beliefs Among Non-Native Alaskans of Low Socio-Economic Status: Implications for Program Planning*. This report contains information about smoking prevalence, exposure, quitting, and tobacco-related knowledge and opinions among low SES non-Native Alaskans. Findings in the report are translated into recommendations for program planning.

A full copy of the report and additional fact sheets are available online from the Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program: www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/tobacco

