

PREVENTING TOBACCO USE 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.

Preventing Tobacco Use among Low SES non-Native Alaskans

Disparities in Tobacco Use and Tobacco-Related Death

- The odds of being a current smoker are more than double among low SES non-Native Alaskans compared to their higher SES counterparts (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.
- Among low SES smokers, 38% will eventually die from smoking-related disease.
- The mortality burden from smoking is about double for low SES versus higher SES Alaskans: 16% of the low SES population will die prematurely from a smoking-related disease, compared to 7% of the higher SES population.

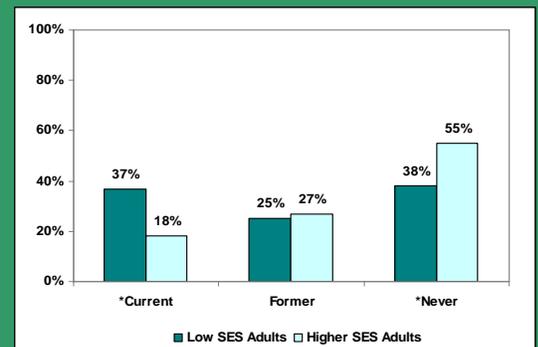
Initiation of Smoking

- 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%) start smoking regularly before age 18, compared to half of higher SES current smokers (51%).

Exposure to Secondhand Smoke

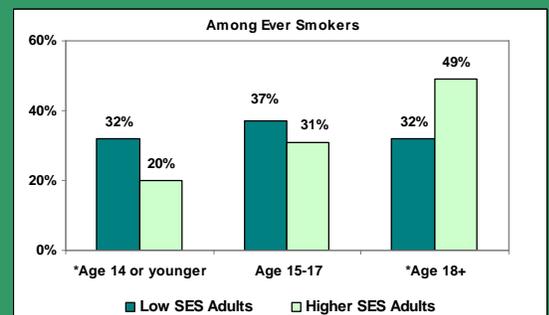
- Secondhand smoke exposure is associated with becoming a smoker, and also increases the risk of tobacco-related illness among children and youth, such as respiratory infections, ear problems, asthma and slowed lung growth.
- Low SES Alaskans are more likely than their higher SES counterparts to be exposed to smoke in the home (22% vs. 11%), in their vehicles (37% vs. 20%), and at their indoor workplaces (34% vs. 21%).
- Even low SES non-smokers are at higher risk for smoke exposure than higher SES non-smokers.
- Four out of five low SES persons have rules about no smoking in their homes, but only 2 out of 3 have these rules for their vehicles.

Current Adult Cigarette Smoking



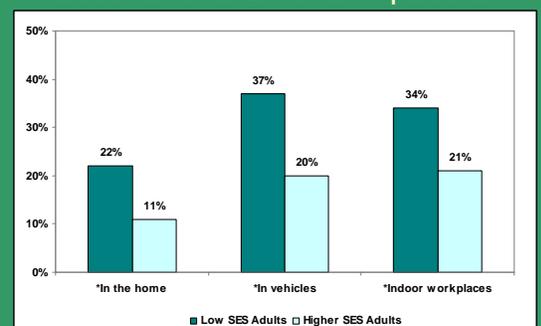
Source: Alaska BRFSS 2004-2006

When did you start smoking regularly?



Source: Alaska BRFSS 2004

Secondhand Smoke Exposure



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.

Exposure to Secondhand Smoke

- Smoke exposure at home is highest for those who are unemployed, unable to work, those without children, and those who are divorced or separated.
- One out of six people with children in their household report smoke exposure in the home.
- Smoke exposure in personal vehicles is highest for those who are unemployed, unmarried people, those who are divorced or separated, and those who are unable to work.
- Although nearly 4 in 5 employed persons have smoke-free clean indoor air policies at work, 1 in 3 reported recent smoke exposure somewhere at work.
- Smoke exposure at work is highest for unmarried workers and men.
- More than 1 in 4 non-smoking workers reported being exposed to smoke at their indoor workplace.

Preventing Tobacco Use and Changing Social Norms

Support for Clean Indoor Air and Protection from Secondhand Smoke

- Support for smoke-free policies is strong among all Alaskans; 4 out of 5 low SES non-Native Alaskans and nearly 3 out of 4 low SES non-Native smokers agree that people should be protected from smoke from other people's cigarettes.
- Most low SES smokers report that they would go to restaurants (87%) and bars (66%) as much or more often if those establishments were completely smoke-free, and support of smoke-free restaurants and bars is even higher among former smokers and non-smokers.

Strategies for Tobacco Prevention

- Tobacco prevention and education campaigns should include a focus on changing social norms so that smoking and secondhand smoke exposure becomes less accepted among all Alaskans, especially low SES populations.
- Comprehensive clean indoor air policies are one method of encouraging norm change, and there is general support among people of low SES and those of higher SES for protecting all people from harm from smoke.
- Persons of low SES are more likely to start smoking, more likely to do so at an early age, and twice as likely to currently smoke. It is critical that tobacco prevention efforts reach young people, before they start smoking.
- In support of changing social norms and preventing future smoking, tobacco prevention efforts are also closely tied to helping current smokers quit. A comprehensive approach will address disparities that affect low SES smokers' ability to quit successfully, such as early initiation of tobacco use and less access to regular health care.
- Tobacco prevention and control public awareness campaigns should be tailored to low SES populations, using appropriate actors and models and relevant channels of communication.

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

