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6. Teens & Tobacco: A Fatal Attraction
Teens & Tobacco: A Fatal Attraction

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...five adult smokers say they would like to quit. Unfortunately, teens have not followed the same trend. Smoking and Teens. Historically, male teens have come of age as adults much earlier than they do today. As adult smoking caught on, so did teen smoking. By age sixteen or seventeen, teen boys were considered adult, old enough to marry and fight in wars. The trends we've discussed historically have included these older teens. ...

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...smoking: 9 percent are already regular smokers. By seventeen, a whopping 77 percent of American teens have tried smoking; one quarter of the entire teen population smokes frequently. Despite health classes on the horrors of smoking, complete with
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that the more governments control tobacco promotion, the greater the decline in tobacco consumption, including consumption by young people. 24 Most effective is a three-pronged approach: education, increase in price, and total ban on advertising.

Other recommendations include restricting promotions and ads on billboards, public transportation, sports facilities, and points of sale; and banning use of trademarks, brand names, and logos in movies, television, and at public events.

Regulating Cigarettes

Studies that analyze whether teens actually heed label warnings show that "as far as teenagers are concerned, the Surgeon General's warning is not an effective public health education tool."22 In one study, for example, only 37 percent of adolescents looked at the health warning long enough to read it; 44 percent didn't look at the warning at all. 23 Current labels are too small, inconspicuous, and are often in colors that blend in with the package or ad. On billboards, warnings are almost impossible to read while driving. By brand names, however, are noticed and remembered.

Teens still underestimate the long-term dangers of smoking, including the risks of addiction. We need warnings, researchers say, that are specific, attention getting, written in clear, short, concise, and straightforward language, and printed in large, prominent letters. Warnings also need to be personally relevant. Current U.S. warnings (four rotating messages) do not reflect research since 1984, including information on secondhand smoke, addiction, chemical additives, new findings on disease, and more. We clearly need revamped, up-to-date warning labels. Suggestions — all blunt and to the point — include "Cigarettes kill, one in every three smokers will die from smoking"; "Smoking during pregnancy can harm your baby"; "Cigarettes can kill you"; and "Smoking causes lung cancer."
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