

NCI TOBACCO CONTROL MONOGRAPH SERIES

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THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING AND REDUCING TOBACCO USE MONOGRAPH NINETEEN

19

Information for the General Public

In our daily lives, we are more and more surrounded and influenced by messages delivered through the mass media—all competing to gain our attention and change our attitudes and behavior. In regard to our health, the messages we have heard in the media about cigarettes and other tobacco products have made a big difference since the 1950s when public health leaders and the media began to publicize the health risks associated with tobacco consumption. Tobacco use is still the single largest cause of preventable death in the United States. And, although many people have stopped smoking, about 20% of American adults still smoke, and more than 4,000 young people smoke their first cigarette each day.


This monograph, from the National Cancer Institute, explores how mass media have affected our attitudes and behavior toward tobacco use. The media have been used successfully both to promote tobacco use and to reduce it. Now, when the use of mass media is expanding and the tobacco industry is finding new ways to encourage tobacco use, a full understanding of this issue is critical to public health.

For example, we are used to seeing tobacco advertisements in newspapers and magazines and where cigarettes are sold, such as in convenience stores. Are we affected the same way when we see actors smoke in movies? Should we be concerned about tobacco advertisements in new or nontraditional forms of media, such as the Internet and video games used extensively by our nation's youth?

To help us understand these issues, this monograph provides important facts about media and tobacco use, including:

- Tobacco advertising focuses on the needs of adolescents—their desire for independence and popularity—and even brief exposure to tobacco advertising can change their attitudes toward smoking.
- Cigarette advertising and other promotions, such as price discounts, are often seen where cigarettes are sold, especially convenience stores. Evidence shows that seeing advertisements or promotions in these places can cause adolescents to start smoking.

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- When tobacco advertising and promotions are restricted, tobacco use is reduced.
 - Seeing people smoke in movies can cause adolescents to start smoking. R-rated movies show people smoking the most.
 - Youth antitobacco campaigns from the tobacco industry have not worked and even may have increased smoking among adolescents.
 - Mass media campaigns conducted as part of a comprehensive tobacco control program can be effective in reducing smoking.

This monograph begins the important process of understanding the full extent of the use of mass media to influence tobacco use, especially among youth—one of our most vulnerable populations. Despite considerable success in tobacco control since the media publicity surrounding the 1964 Surgeon General’s Report on smoking and health, tobacco use still accounts for nearly one-third of cancer deaths worldwide, and by 2015 such deaths are predicted to increase. If this trend is to be stopped, an understanding of the media’s power for both tobacco control and tobacco promotion must guide the way.

About the NCI Tobacco Control Monograph Series

The National Cancer Institute established the Tobacco Control Monograph series in 1991 to provide ongoing and timely information about emerging issues in smoking and tobacco prevention and control. Monographs are available at no cost in print and online.

For More Information

For more information or to order this monograph, go to <http://www.cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/19/index.htm>. To order a free copy, call the NCI Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) and ask for NIH Publication No. 07-6242.