

Smoking rates

- Three-quarters of people in the UK who smoke start before the age of 18.ⁱ The 'Growing up in Scotland: life at 14' study found that 16.7% had tried smoking, of which 50% said that they had smoked a whole cigarette before 13.ⁱⁱ
- The largest factors associated with smoking uptake are peer-group smoking, growing up in areas of high deprivation, parents/carers or siblings smoking, low educational attainment, and poor mental health.
- Smoking prevalence among Scottish young adults aged 16-24 increased from 14% in 2019 to 17% in 2022. This trend contrasts with adult smoking prevalence, which decreased two percentage points to 15%. The average number of cigarettes smoked by young adults, however, dropped to 4.4 from 7.6 in 2019.ⁱⁱⁱ
- In 2022, 22% of 16-24-year-old men smoked, compared to 11% of women. This is a rise from the 2019 figures for 16-24-year-old men, when 14% smoked, and down from the 15% of women in this age group.
- The increase in smoking prevalence among young adults might be linked to the increase in e-cigarette use prevalence from 5% in 2019 to 15% in 2022.ⁱ
- 10.5% of 16-24-year-olds in the UK smoke – the lowest ever rate – according to the 2022 Office for National Statistics Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.^{iv}
- 18.2% of 18-21-year-olds in England smoked in 2023 according to the Smoking Toolkit survey. The rate has dropped since 2020. At 18.6%, however, it is similar to the rate in 2018*.^v

Health impacts of smoking and second-hand smoke

- Tobacco smoke causes cancer and respiratory diseases. Between half to two-thirds of people who smoke and do not quit will be killed by tobacco-related illness.
- Smoking can cause poorer wellbeing, and nicotine cravings can cause anxiety. It is a common misconception that smoking relieves stress, anxiety and low mood. Giving up smoking will improve a person's health, wellbeing and will reduce exposure to second-hand smoke for those around them.
- Being regularly exposed to indoor tobacco smoke increases a non-smoker's chances of developing lung cancer by 20 to 30%.
- Second-hand smoke affects the heart, blood vessels, and blood circulation in a harmful way and, over time, can cause heart disease, strokes or heart attacks.

Financial and environmental impacts of smoking

- The cheapest packs of 20 cigarettes cost more than £11. When someone who smoked 10 cigarettes per day quits, they could save more than £2,000 a year.
- Discarded smoking-related items are the most common type of litter on Scotland's streets.
- Billions of cigarette filters are littered each year in Scotland. They can take up to 12 years to degrade and leak toxins that contaminate water as well as harm marine life and the environment. Cigarette filters have been found in the stomachs of fish, birds, whales and other marine creatures who mistake them for food.

Supporting young adults to give up or never start smoking

- Two-thirds of 16-24-year-old people who smoke say they would like to stop.^{vi}
- Young adults are among the least likely to attempt to give up smoking and quit successfully, particularly those living in socio-economically deprived communities.^{vii}
- Expert stop smoking support provided by NHS Scotland's Quit Your Way service (QuitYourWay.scot or freephone 0800 848484) can increase the chances of success by three to four times..
- In March 2024, the UK Government introduced its UK-wide Tobacco and Vapes Bill which, if it progresses through the parliamentary process, will change the law so that, from 2027, anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 (i.e. children aged 15 or younger in 2024) will never legally be sold tobacco products.

Action on Smoking & Health (Scotland) (ASH Scotland) is a registered Scottish charity (SC 010412) and a company limited by guarantee (Scottish company no 141711)

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