**Why Young People Use Tobacco**

There are many reasons young people begin using tobacco. Teenagers, and even preteens, are developing behaviors, social connections, and attitudes. They often experiment with different behaviors because they see these behaviors in peers they admire, in adults they hope to be like someday, or in media or entertainment idols.

SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Adolescents and young adults are very susceptible to social influences. If they see tobacco use as a normal behavior because their friends or family members use tobacco, young people are more likely to try tobacco themselves. Teens and young adults highly value their friendships and want to fit in with their group. What their peers do—and especially what the leaders of their social groups do—can have a strong influence on what they do. Young people whose friends smoke are much more likely to smoke as well.

PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Nicotine is just as addictive as heroin and cocaine. Because they are sensitive to nicotine, teens can feel dependent on tobacco sooner than adults. There is also evidence that genetics might make it more difficult for some young people to quit smoking once they have started.

PREVENTING TOBACCO USE AMONG YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

Teens and young adults are sensitive to what they see and hear in the world around them. If they are exposed to images that portray smokers as cool, attractive, rebellious, funloving, risk-taking, or other characteristics they admire, young people may want to smoke, too. Such images are often found in advertising displays at convenience stores and other outlets that sell tobacco. Communities that allow the sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products near schools have higher rates of youth tobacco use than do communities that have tobacco-free zones around schools. If teens and young adults see tobacco use in their homes or in public places within their communities, these images encourage them to see smoking as a normal part of adult behavior.

MOVIES

For many years, tobacco companies paid studios to have their products appear in movies. Even though this practice is no longer allowed, movies for youth, and even some movies for children, may include images of characters using tobacco. These images are powerful because they can make smoking seem like a normal, acceptable, or even attractive activity. Young people may also look up to movie stars, both on and off screen, and may want to imitate behaviors they see. Over time, the number of images of tobacco use in movies has gone down. But movies still contain thousands of images of tobacco use that are proven to encourage young people to start smoking. In 2010, nearly a third of top-grossing youth-rated movies—those with G, PG, or PG-13 ratings—contained images of tobacco use.

**This is how many teens and young adults use tobacco today:**

* 3 million high school students and 600,000 middle school students smoke cigarettes.
* 1 in 3 young adults smokes cigarettes.
* 1 in 4 high school seniors smokes cigarettes.
* 1 in 5 male high school seniors smokes cigars and
* 1 in 10 uses smokeless tobacco.
* Many young people use more than one type of tobacco. Among those who use tobacco, more than half of high school males and nearly a third of high school females use more than one tobacco product. These products include cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco, such as chew and snus, a dry snuff in a small teabag-like sachet.