

The NHSDA Report

November 22, 2002

How Youths Get Cigarettes

In Brief

- In 2001, over 3 million youths aged 12 to 17 had smoked cigarettes during the past month
- About three fifths of past month smokers aged 12 to 17 had a friend or relative buy cigarettes for them at least one time during the past month
- Among youths who smoked during the past month, females were more likely than males to have friends or relatives buy cigarettes for them during the past month

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) asks respondents aged 12 or older to report whether they smoked cigarettes during the month before the survey interview. Youths aged 12 to 17 who reported past month smoking were asked about how they got their cigarettes during this time period.¹

Past Month Cigarette Use among Youths

In 2001, over 3 million youths aged 12 to 17 (13 percent) had smoked cigarettes during the past month. Youths aged 12 or 13 were less likely to have smoked cigarettes during the past month than those aged 14 to 17 (Figure 1). Females aged 12 to 17 were more likely to have smoked cigarettes during the past month (14 percent) than males (12 percent). American Indian/Alaska Native youths (29 percent) were more likely to have smoked cigarettes during the past month than white (15 percent), Hispanic (10 percent), Asian (7 percent), or black youths (7 percent).

Common Sources of Cigarettes

In 2001, about three fifths (62 percent) of past month smokers aged 12 to 17 had a friend or relative buy cigarettes for them at least one time during the past month (Table 1). Even

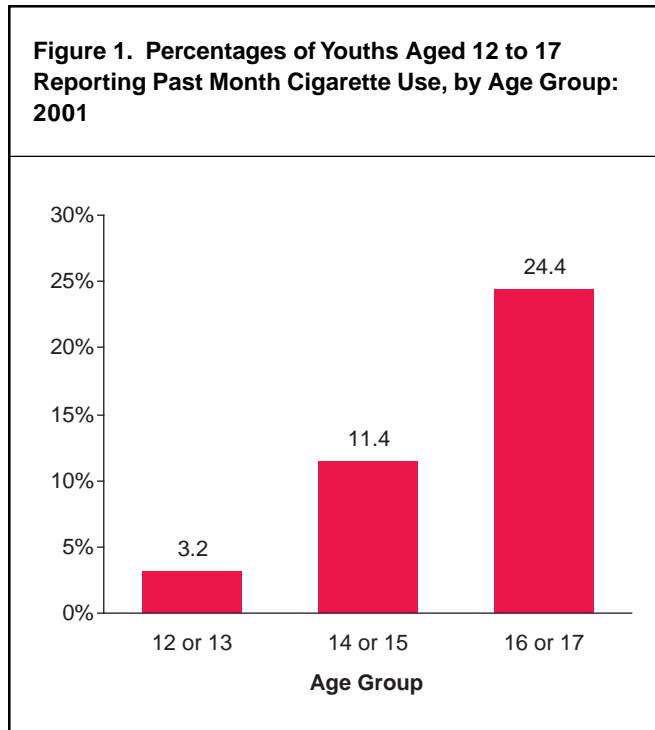


Table 1. Percentages of Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 to 17 Reporting Source of Their Cigarettes During the Past Month:* 2001

Source of Cigarettes	Percentage
Friends/relatives bought them for youth	61.7
Youth bought personally	51.9
Store where clerk hands out the cigarettes	28.5
From a friend, relative, or someone at school	28.1
Small store, convenience store, or gas station	28.0
Store where cigarettes are taken to counter	20.1
Vending machine	14.4
Big supermarket	9.8
Drug store	9.1
Mail	3.8
Internet	3.3

though this rate was significantly lower than the rate in 2000 (Figure 2), this was still the predominant method of cigarette access among youths in 2001.

Although it is illegal in the United States to sell tobacco to underaged youths, in 2001 almost 2 million youths aged 12 to 17 who smoked cigarettes in the past month purchased them personally during the same time period. The proportion of past month youth smokers who bought their own cigarettes during the past month fell from 59 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2001. The proportion of past month smokers aged 12 to 17 who bought cigarettes at a store where a clerk handed out cigarettes fell from 34 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2001. This decline was largely attributable to youth smokers aged 14 to 17. In 2001, approximately 28 percent of past month smokers aged 12 to 17 bought cigarettes at small stores, convenience stores, or gas stations,

and 28 percent bought them from a friend, relative, or someone at school. The percentage of past month youth smokers reporting no cigarette purchase (either through friends or relatives or by themselves) during the past month increased from 19 percent in 2000 to 25 percent in 2001.

Demographic Differences

Among youths who smoked during the past month, older youths were more likely than younger ones to obtain cigarettes through a purchase (either through friends or relatives or by themselves) during the same time period (Table 2). Among youths, females who smoked during the past month were more likely than their male peers to have friends or relatives buy cigarettes for them during the past month (68 percent of females vs. 55 percent of males), but the percentages of past month smokers who bought their own cigarettes during the past month

were similar among males and females (52 percent). Among past month smokers, white youths were more likely than black or Hispanic youths to have a friend or relative buy cigarettes for them during the past month; however, the percentages of past month smokers aged 12 to 17 who bought cigarettes on their own during this time period were similar among white, black, and Hispanic youths (Figure 3).

End Note

1. Response options were as follows: A friend or relative bought cigarettes for youth; youth bought cigarettes from a vending machine; youth bought cigarettes through the mail; youth bought cigarettes in a store where the youth picked up the pack or carton and brought it to the check-out counter; youth bought cigarettes in a store where the clerk had to hand youth the pack or carton; youth bought cigarettes through the Internet; youth bought cigarettes at a big supermarket; youth bought cigarettes at a drug store; youth bought cigarettes at a small grocery store, a convenience store, or at a gas station; and youth bought cigarettes from an individual, such as a friend, a relative, or someone at school. The response categories were not mutually exclusive, and youths could provide more than one response.

Figure 2. Percentages of Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 to 17 Reporting Source of Their Cigarettes During the Past Month:* 2000 and 2001

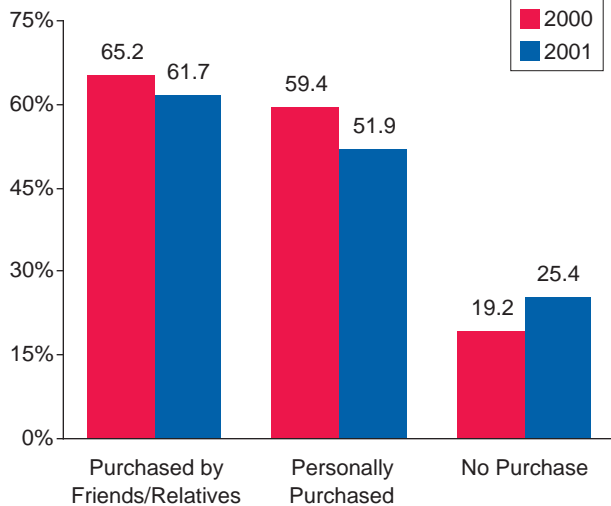


Table 2. Percentages and Standard Errors of Percentages of Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 to 17 Reporting Source of Their Cigarettes During the Past Month,* by Age Group: 2001

Source of Cigarettes	%	SE
<i>Ages 12 or 13</i>		
Friends/relatives bought them for youth	46.1	4.10
Youth bought personally	29.7	3.57
<i>Ages 14 or 15</i>		
Friends/relatives bought them for youth	63.0	1.91
Youth bought personally	45.7	2.00
<i>Ages 16 or 17</i>		
Friends/relatives bought them for youth	63.1	1.41
Youth bought personally	57.9	1.40

SE = Standard error

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2000 and 2001 data are based on information obtained from 141,000 persons aged 12 or older (approximately 70,000 each year), including more than 48,000 youths aged 12 to 17 (approximately 24,000 each year). The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NHSDA Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Information and data for this issue are based on the following publication and statistics:

Office of Applied Studies. (2001). *Summary of findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 01-3549, NHSDA Series: H-13). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Office of Applied Studies. (2002). *Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 02-3758, NHSDA Series H-17). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available on-line: www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov.

Additional tables available upon request.



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Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
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Figure 3. Percentages of Past Month Cigarette Smokers Aged 12 to 17 Reporting Source of Their Cigarettes During the Past Month,* by Race/Ethnicity: 2001**

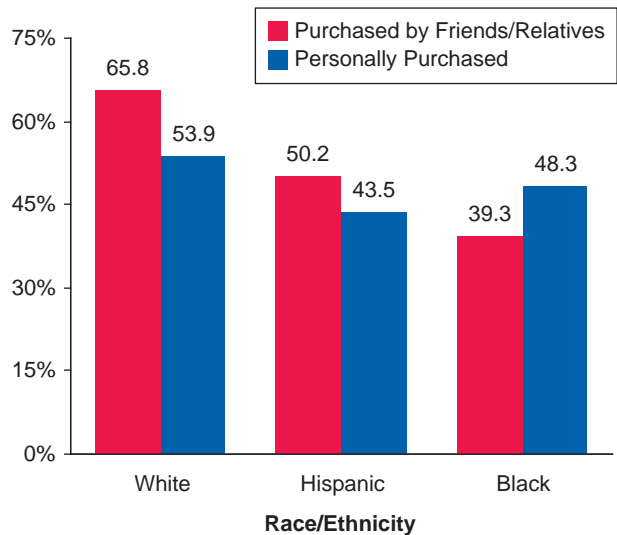


Figure and Table Notes

* Past month cigarette smokers aged 12 to 17 were asked whether a friend or relative had bought cigarettes for them and if they personally had bought cigarettes during the past month from a variety of sources. Respondents were asked whether they had obtained cigarettes one or more times from each of these sources; thus, the response categories are not mutually

exclusive. Respondents were not asked about other sources from which they might have obtained cigarettes

** Small sample sizes prevented analyses of American Indians/Alaska Natives or Asians.

Source (Figure 2): SAMHSA 2000 and 2001 NHSDAs.

Source (other tables and figures): SAMHSA 2001 NHSDA.