

MEDIA RELEASE
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Survey finds worrying increase in popularity of roll-your-own tobacco amongst Australian teens

Latest stats show that teenage smoking rates have declined, but roll-your-own tobacco remains a threat

Cancer Council is calling for Governments to take action to protect adolescents from tobacco industry influence, following the release of new data showing the popularity of roll-your-own tobacco use amongst teens has recently increased.

The findings, highlighted today to coincide with World No Tobacco Day, show that while adolescent smoking rates are dropping, amongst those Australian secondary school students who had smoked in the past month (about 7% of all students), the proportion regularly using roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco has increased from 24% to 29% in just three years (from 2014 to 2017).

Most students who smoked in the past month had used RYO tobacco at some time (73%).

The latest Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) survey found that 82% of teens had never smoked, up from 77% in 2011.

Anita Dessaix, Chair of Cancer Council Australia's Public Health Committee, said that drops in teenage smoking were encouraging and a tribute to Australia's world-leading tobacco control measures, but warned Governments should be concerned about increasingly aggressive tactics used by the tobacco industry.

"Over the past seven years, tobacco companies have dramatically stepped up attempts to recruit a new cohort of younger smokers, with all companies introducing RYO products as part of the range of the most popular cigarette brands.

"Companies have been producing progressively smaller and smaller pouches of tobacco that are cheaper upfront, keeping the price low despite annual increases in tobacco taxes - and in the process making roll-your-own much more affordable and accessible to young people."

Cancer Council Victoria analysis shows that in 2010, no products on the market were smaller than 30 grams. By 2017, almost half the products on the market were 27, 25 or 20 grams, making many RYO products cheaper than the smallest available pack of cigarettes. Over recent months, several 15 gram products have appeared in shops.

Ms Dessaix said 'Kiddy packs' of less than 20 cigarettes were banned decades ago by governments.

"Now is not the time for complacency. We call on governments to similarly protect young people from the tobacco industry's sinister tactics and ensure that roll-your-own tobacco cannot be sold in pouches any smaller than 30 grams."

ASSAD is a comprehensive survey of smoking, alcohol and drug use about 12 – 17year olds and is conducted every three years by Cancer Council Victoria. The 2017 survey was funded by the federal Department of Health.

The national survey found:

- About 79,000 Australian secondary school students aged 12 to 17 were current smokers in 2017, down from 81,000 in 2014
- 82% of secondary school students had never smoked, up from 77% in 2011
- The proportion of students smoking at least once a month declined from 9% in 2011 to 7% in 2017
- 48% of current smokers got cigarettes from friends
- Among students smoking at least once a month, the proportion who had used RYO at least 20 times increased from 24% to 29%

Todd Harper, CEO of Cancer Council Victoria, said it was encouraging to see fewer adolescents than ever experimenting with smoking, with only 2% of students having smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime.

“Research shows us that most smokers begin smoking before the age of 25, and many in adolescence.

“By continuing to increase the proportion of young people who are ‘never smokers’ we can improve the overall health of the population,” Mr Harper said.

“Significant progress has been made, but further action is required to achieve continued declines in smoking by Australian adolescents by preventing uptake and aiding quitting.

“By being vigilant, we can tackle new and innovative tobacco marketing strategies as they develop. Proven strategies will require continued investment, including tobacco excise, and the delivery of tailored and integrated marketing communication strategies for anti-tobacco campaigns that motivate and support quitting.”

“All Governments need to continue to take action to ensure we continue to protect our next generation from the tobacco industry.”

World No Tobacco Day is a global initiative to which aims to raise awareness of deadly effects of tobacco use and second-hand smoke. The theme for this year’s World No Tobacco Day is “tobacco and lung health”. In Australia, about 90% of lung cancer cases in males and 65% in females are estimated to be a result of tobacco smoking.

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For media enquiries please contact Helena Dominish via the media hotline (02) 8063 4109 or media@cancer.org.au

About the survey:

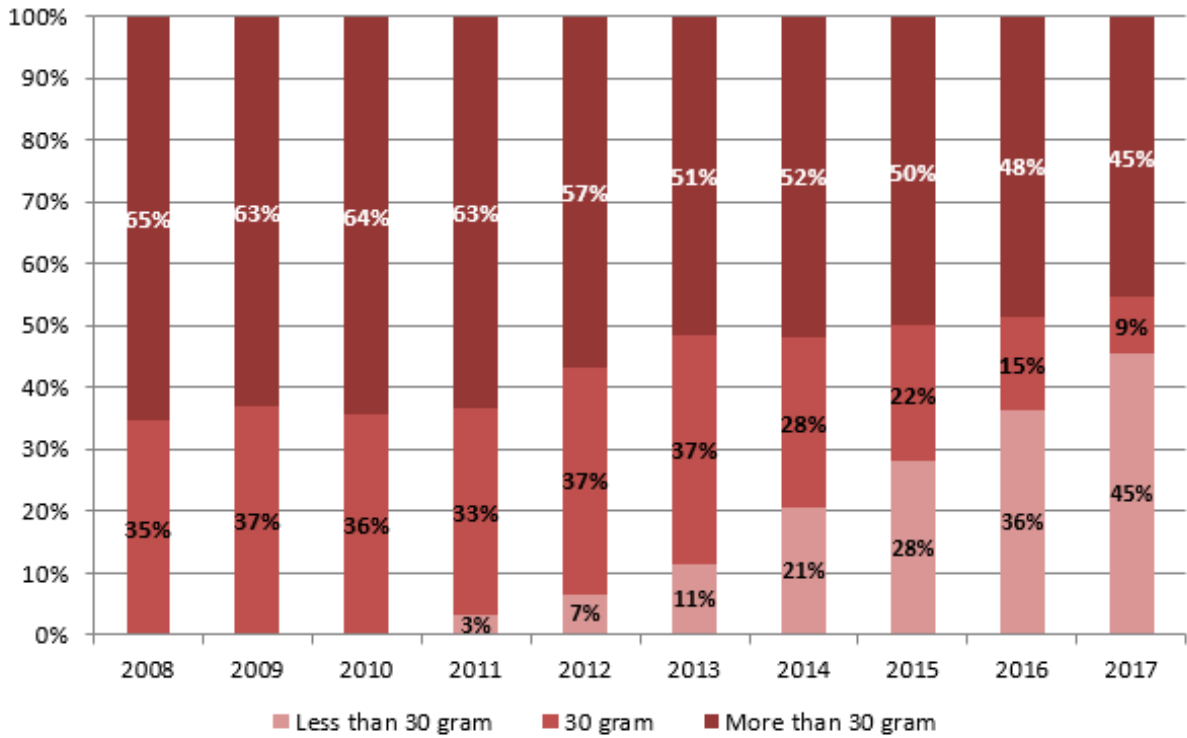
Cancer Council Victoria has coordinated the Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug survey for more than 30 years and was conducted in 2017 in conjunction with the Federal Department of Health.

This long-term public health research endeavour is undertaken with human research ethics approval, as well as approvals from education authorities, schools and parents.

The survey collects information on student age, gender, indigenous status, postcode, pocket money, self-assessment of academic achievement, and information on smoking and drinking practices, how children got access to cigarettes, brand preferences, and attitudes to smoking and drinking.

Access the full Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug 2017 Report at: <https://beta.health.gov.au/resources/publications/secondary-school-students-use-of-tobacco-alcohol-and-other-drugs-in-2017>

Proportion of RYO products in each pouch size, 2008-2017



Source: Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer annual checks of tobacco industry retail price lists