



Tobacco and LGBTQ+ Communities

Protect yourself and the people you care about.

LGBTQ+ communities have a higher incidence of tobacco use than other Americans. Here are some facts to help you protect yourself and the people you love from the risks of tobacco use and exposure.

The facts

Tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the US. Smoking raises the risk of lung cancer, heart disease, bronchitis, and other diseases.

Studies show that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other (LGBTQ+) adults in the US are much more likely than heterosexual adults to smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products. LGBTQ+ young adults (18-24) are almost twice as likely to use tobacco as non-LGBTQ+ young adults. And within the LGBTQ+ community, transgender adults have the highest rate of smoking.

Why the difference?

LGBTQ+ youth and adults face many stresses caused by social stigma and negative reactions related to “coming out.” These added stresses may increase the risk of using tobacco.

In addition, the tobacco industry is well aware of the higher tobacco use by LGBTQ+ individuals. Tobacco companies have targeted the LGBTQ+ community in an effort to increase their sales. The LGBTQ+ community has been targeted in 3 ways:

- **Direct advertising:** Ads in magazines and other publications for LGBTQ+ audiences.

- **Indirect advertising:** Ads with same-sex undertones in mainstream magazines with high gay and lesbian readership.
- **Sponsorships:** Branded promotional items and money for LGBTQ+ events and organizations that support LGBTQ+ issues.

The tobacco industry also focuses on themes important to LGBTQ+ communities: civil rights, individualism, social success, and acceptance. But don't be fooled; their true motivation is the marketing of their dangerous products.

Who is affected and how?

- **LGBTQ+ youth:** As many as 26% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual high school-age youth smoke cigarettes or cigars or use smokeless tobacco, compared to 18% of non-LGBTQ+ teens.
- **HIV-positive community:** Smoking is a leading cause of death in those who are HIV-positive and have the virus under control. In fact, HIV today shortens life by an average of about 5 years, but those who smoke and have HIV lose an average of 12 years of life.
- **The LGBTQ+ community:** As individuals, people's lives are shortened by tobacco. As a community, everyone is exposed to the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. For LGBTQ+ organizations, the strength of any anti-tobacco messages is weakened when they accept money from tobacco companies.

The best defense

- **Don't start.** Tobacco is addictive. Avoid the urge to start. Encourage your family and friends not to start, too.
- **Knowledge.** There is no safe form of tobacco. Also, while e-cigarettes and other types of “vaping” devices do not contain tobacco, they do contain nicotine, which comes from tobacco. More research is needed to know what the long-term health effects of using these devices may be. It's important to know that all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, can pose health risks to the user.
- **Quit.** It often takes people who smoke 5 to 7 tries before stopping for good. Don't give up! Free help is often available. Ask your health care provider for help. Or call us for tips and resources that can give you a better chance of quitting.
- **Protect yourself.** Secondhand smoke is harmful. Speak up for smoke-free bars, restaurants, clubs, and workplaces.
- **Take a stand.** Join the American Cancer Society Cancer Action NetworkSM (ACS CAN) to speak out for increased tobacco taxes, smoke-free public places, and insurance coverage for quit-smoking treatment and medicines. (ACS CAN is the non-partisan, non-profit advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society.)

If you quit smoking today, you'll feel a difference after:

- **20 minutes:** Your heart rate and blood pressure drop.
- **A few days:** The carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- **2 weeks to 3 months:** Your circulation improves. Your lung function increases.
- **1 to 12 months:** Coughing and shortness of breath decrease. The tiny hair-like structures (cilia) that move mucus out of your lungs start to regain normal function, increasing the ability to handle mucus, clean the lungs, and reduce the risk of infection.
- **1 to 2 years:** Your risk of heart attack drops dramatically.
- **5 to 10 years:** Your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, and voice box (larynx) is cut in half. Your stroke risk decreases.
- **10 years:** Your risk of lung cancer is about half that of a person who is still smoking (after 10-15 years). Your risk of cancer of the bladder, esophagus, and kidney decreases.
- **15 years:** Your risk of coronary heart disease is close to that of someone who doesn't smoke.

Increase your chances of quitting for good. Visit cancer.org/quit tobacco or call your American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** to speak with someone who can help. We're here when you need us.



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No.202500 Rev.3/22
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