

TOBACCO FACT SHEET

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) COMMUNITIES AND SMOKING



Limited data is available regarding tobacco use among the LGBT community. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), “researchers face a number of challenges in understanding the health needs of LGBT populations, including a lack of data.”¹ The findings from the National Adult Tobacco Survey (NATS) are currently the only national data available on tobacco use and sexual orientation.² Further research is still needed to better understand the prevalence of tobacco use within the LGBT community and the risk factors that influence LGBT smoking behavior, in particular in the transgender community. Various public health and governmental organizations have recognized the need for more data on sexual orientation and health including data on tobacco use.³

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services plans to add a question about sexual orientation to the 2013 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).⁴

ADULTS

- Findings from the 2009-2010 National Adult Tobacco Survey (NATS) indicate that prevalence (for any type of current tobacco use as well as current cigarette, cigar, cigarillo, or small cigar smoking, and water pipe use) rates were higher for LGBT respondents compared to heterosexual respondents.⁵
- Prevalence of any type of current tobacco use is higher for LGBT adults (38.5%) compared to heterosexual adults (25.3%) in the U.S.⁵
- Current cigarette smoking prevalence in the U.S. is 19.5% for heterosexual adults and 32.8% for LGBT adults.⁵
- Prevalence of current cigar, cigarillo, or small cigar smoking is higher for LGBT adults (12.2%) compared to heterosexual adults (6.5%) in the U.S.⁵
- Prevalence of current water pipe smoking is higher among LGBT adults (6.1%) compared to heterosexual adults (1.5%) in the U.S.⁵
- Overall, sexual minorities are 1.5 to 2.5 times more likely to smoke cigarettes than their heterosexual counterparts.⁶ Bisexual women are up to three and a half times more likely to be smokers than heterosexual women.⁶
- Several factors such as higher levels of social stress, frequent patronage of bars and clubs, higher rates of alcohol and drug use, and direct targeting of LGB* consumers by the tobacco industry may be related to higher prevalence rates of tobacco use among LGB groups compared to the general population.⁷
- Although the data is limited to state level surveys, studies show that bisexuals smoke at higher rates than their heterosexual, gay and lesbian peers with prevalence rates as high as 48%.⁸⁻¹¹

YOUTH

- Smoking rates among LGB youth are estimated to be considerably higher (38%- 59%) than those among adolescents in general (28% -35%).⁷
- Adolescent boys and girls with both-sex romantic attractions or relationships are more likely to be smokers than adolescents with opposite-sex attractions or relationships.^{12,13}
- In a national sample of youth, lesbian and bisexual girls were 9.7 times more likely to smoke cigarettes at least weekly compared to heterosexual girls.¹⁴

* The limited studies available on this population do not include specific information on transgender individuals as a subgroup.

- Research suggests that smoking rates are high among LGB youth because of unique stressors that contribute to their risk of substance use such as the stresses of “coming out,” physical and verbal victimization, feelings of alienation, and depression.⁷

INDUSTRY TARGETING AND MARKETING

- Industry documents show that tobacco companies were aware of high smoking rates among sexual minorities, and marketing plans illustrate the companies’ efforts to exploit the LGB market.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Analysis of tobacco marketing has demonstrated lesbian and gay youth as an emerging target community.¹⁸
- One tobacco industry document explained, “A large percentage of gays and lesbians are smokers. In order to grow the Benson & Hedges brand, it is imperative to identify new markets with growth potential... Gays and Lesbians are good prospects for the Benson & Hedges brand.”¹⁵
- The tobacco industry has targeted gays and lesbians through direct advertising in LGBT publications and indirect advertising in mainstream publications, community outreach and community promotions (such as “LGBT bar nights featuring specific cigarette brands”), event sponsorships, and the provision of advertising dollars.¹⁹
- In 1995, a tobacco company conducted a marketing plan called “Project SCUM” (Sub Culture Urban Marketing) targeting urban San Francisco populations, including gays.¹⁷

SMOKING CESSATION AND AWARENESS

- Compared to all adult smokers, more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender smokers believe smoking increases their risk of diseases such as lung cancer and heart disease. However, some research indicates that fewer LGBT smokers have made quit attempts (75% compared with 80% of all adults).²⁰
- Although lesbian women and women who have sex with women (WSW) smoke at the highest rates, one study found that lesbian periodicals had the fewest cessation ads: only eight appeared over a ten-year period, compared to over 1,000 in periodicals targeted to gay men.²¹
- Despite high rates of smoking among LGBT individuals, only 24% of LGBT community leaders interviewed between 2002 and 2004 named tobacco use as a pressing health concern for the LGBT community.²²

¹Institute of Medicine. *Report Brief: The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding*. Washington, DC; 2011. Available at: http://iom.edu/-/media/Files/Report_Files/2011/The-Health-of-Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-and-Transgender-People/LGBT_Health_2011_Report_Brief.pdf.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2009-2010 National Adult Tobacco Survey. Methodology Report. 2011. Unpublished Report.

³HHS Press Office, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Affordable Care Act to improve data collection, reduce health disparities. *Press Release*. Available at: <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2011pres/06/20110629a.html>. Accessed June 7, 2012.

⁴Brown D. Main federal health survey will ask about sexual orientation, gender identity. *The Washington Post*. http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/main-federal-health-survey-will-ask-about-sexual-orientation-gender-identity/2011/06/29/AGMZwMrH_story.html?wpisrc=emailtoafriend. Published June 29, 2011.

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⁶Lee J, Griffin GK, Melvin CL. Tobacco use among sexual minorities in the USA, 1987 to May 2007: a systematic review. *Tob Control*. 2009;18(4):275-282.

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