

Prevalence and Trends in Smoking: A National Rural Study

Issues

Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. One of the national health objectives from HealthyPeople 2010 is to reduce the prevalence of cigarette smoking among adults to 12 percent. To achieve this goal, a better understanding of factors associated with smoking is needed. Regional differences in smoking-related morbidity and mortality exist, but information on recent trends in smoking rates by type of rural location and sociodemographic characteristics is incomplete.

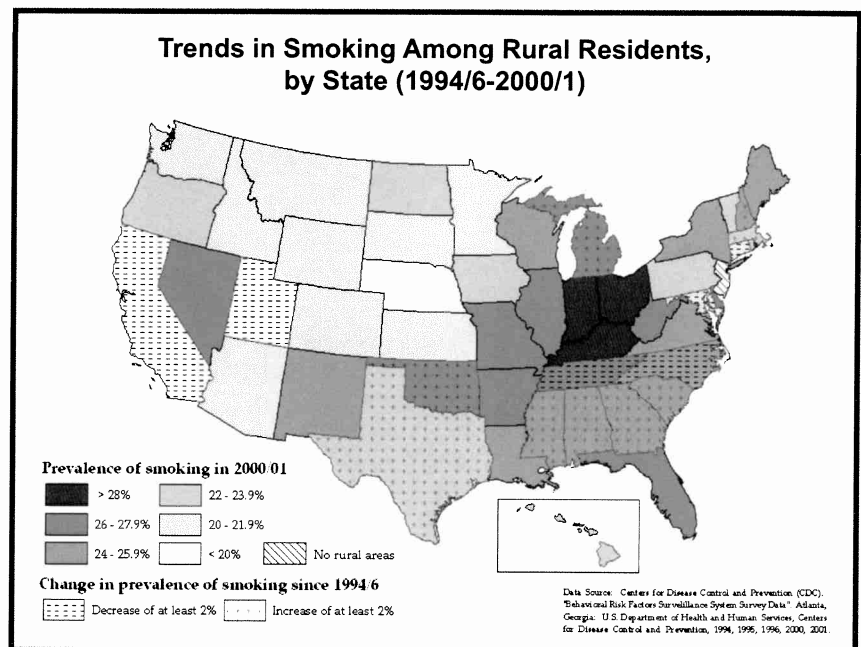
Study Design

The study involved a random-digit telephone survey of adults aged 18 years or older who participated in the state-based Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System in 1994-1996 (n = 342,055) and 2000-2001 (n = 385,384). Current cigarette smoking is defined as persons who smoke every day or some days, while non-smokers are those who smoke not at all or reported never having smoked as many as 100 cigarettes.

Findings

The prevalence of smoking changed little from the mid-1990s; it was 22.0 percent in urban areas, 24.9 percent in rural adjacent areas, 24.0 percent in large rural non-adjacent areas, and 24.9 percent in small rural non-adjacent areas. For rural locations combined, its prevalence was not below the 12 percent goal of HealthyPeople 2010 for any state, although the 12.5 percent prevalence in rural Utah approached this target. Its prevalence was ≥ 28 percent for rural residents of Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana. Since the mid-1990s, the prevalence of smoking for rural respondents decreased by more than 2 percent in six states, California, Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah. However, it increased by 2 percent or more in ten states, Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas.

Policy Implications: Smoking remains a refractory public health problem. Better public health strategies to prevent smoking initiation and promote cessation in rural America are needed, especially among those with low socioeconomic status and American Indians.



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