

Smoking and your child or teen

Smoking kills more than 45,000 Canadians each year -- six times more than car accidents, suicides, homicides, and AIDS combined. Every year, thousands of teenagers smoke their first cigarette. In fact, close to 90% of adult smokers smoked their first cigarette before the age of 18.

Why are cigarettes so dangerous?

Cigarettes contain nicotine – one of the most addictive substances in the world. Other products with nicotine include: nicotine-containing vaping devices (or e-cigarettes), hookah pipes, cigars, cigarillos, chewing tobacco, and “snuff”. Some newer kinds of smokeless tobacco even look like candy or breath-strips.

How do I know if my child or teen is likely to start smoking?

Some children or teens are more at risk of becoming regular smokers. Here are some factors that could make them more likely to start smoking:

- use of vaping devices/e-cigarettes
- easy access to cigarettes/tobacco (such as from friends, family members, a store or an illegal supplier)
- a parent who smokes
- peer pressure
- low family income
- emotional, physical or sexual abuse in the home
- parents who are separated or divorced
- living with someone who abuses drugs or alcohol, or has been to prison

- doing poorly in school
- depression and mental health problems, or living with someone with mental illness
- exposure to tobacco advertising
- being an LGBTQ or Aboriginal/Indigenous youth

How addictive is nicotine?

Children or teenagers can start craving nicotine just 3 months after their first cigarette.

Teens can experience withdrawal symptoms (physical or emotional symptoms that happen when a person with regular use of a substance stops using it) after smoking less than 100 cigarettes (4-5 packs).

How does nicotine affect my child's brain?

Nicotine can have long-term and harmful effects on a child or teenager's brain. Regular use can lead to a nicotine use disorder and is associated with other substance use problems, as well as mood disorders in adulthood.

Should I worry if my child or teen uses vaping devices/e-cigarettes or smokeless tobacco?

Yes. Vaping devices/e-cigarettes and smokeless tobacco are often seen as being "safer" or less addictive than cigarettes but some of these products actually contain more nicotine. This increases the chances of nicotine dependence and nicotine poisoning. As well:

- Vaping devices/e-cigarettes are associated with an increased risk of using tobacco products.
- The second-hand aerosol from vaping devices/e-cigarettes contains harmful toxins that can worsen existing breathing troubles like asthma.
- Smokeless tobacco can cause bad breath, teeth problems, and increase the risk of ear, nose and throat cancers.

How can I encourage my child or teen not to smoke?

- Limit or eliminate exposure to cigarettes and tobacco/vaping products at home.

- Show interest in your child’s health.
- Have open conversations about smoking/vaping and make sure your child understands the risks.

When and how should I talk to my child or teen about smoking?

It’s never too early or too late to talk to your child or teen about the risks of smoking and vaping. Many children start smoking as early as age 12. Use messaging that is appropriate to your child’s age.

For more information specifically about vaping, visit *Talking with your teen about vaping*.

Age group	What to focus on	Information to share
Age 5 to 11	Negative effects and consequences of smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smoking causes bad breath and yellow teeth.• Smoking makes it harder to keep up during sports.• Your body can get addicted even after smoking just a few times and it will be hard to stop.• Cigarettes are expensive. You could spend your money on more fun things.• Tobacco companies trick kids into thinking smoking is cool and safe.• Smoking can cause cancer and heart attacks.• It’s against the law for kids to buy cigarettes.

Tweens/Teens	Immediate effects of smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoking makes you smell and gives you bad breath. • Smoking makes your teeth yellow and gives you early wrinkles. • You won't be able to run as quickly or do as well at sports if you smoke. • You will have hacking coughs, get more colds and pneumonia. • You will get addicted very quickly. • Cigarettes are expensive—one pack a day for a year could buy a used car (\$1,500 to \$3,500).
	Long-term health consequences of smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smokers are more likely to have fertility problems than non-smokers. • Other forms of tobacco may not be safer than cigarettes. • Smoking exposes the people you love to all the health risks of second-hand smoke.

My child is already smoking. How can I convince them to stop?

Consult the list below, or talk to your child's health care provider. They can offer suggestions and resources to help.

Additional resources

- On the road to quitting: Guide for young adults (Health Canada)
(<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/publications/healthy-living-vie-saine/becoming-non-smoker-youth-guide-jeunes-devenir-non-fumeur/alt/becoming-non-smoker-youth-guide-jeunes-devenir-non-fumeur-eng.pdf>)

- Quit4life: handbook for young smokers trying to quit (Health Canada)
(<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/tobac-tabac/youth-jeunes/life-vie/index-eng.php>)
- Smoking, vaping and tobacco (Government of Canada)
(<http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/healthy-living-vie-saine/tobacco-tabac/index-eng.php>)
- iQuitnow (Quebec Council on Tobacco and Health)
(<https://tobaccofreequebec.ca/iquitnow/>)
- Smokers' helpline: online program, free phone help, self-help books, information for friends and family (Canadian Cancer Society)
(<http://www.smokershelpline.ca/>)
- Smokefree Teen: teen self-help, online tools and information (U.S.)
(<https://teen.smokefree.gov/default.aspx>)

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- Adolescent Health Committee

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