

# Smoking: children

Exposure to smoking harms the health of our children and makes it much more likely they will grow up to become smokers themselves. This makes protecting children from smoke exposure a priority.

- Smoking is an addiction of childhood, not an adult choice
- Children breathing in other people's cigarette smoke results in around [300,000 GP visits](#) each year in the UK
- The best way to protect children from the harm caused by tobacco smoke is to get those around them to quit

## Children not adults start smoking

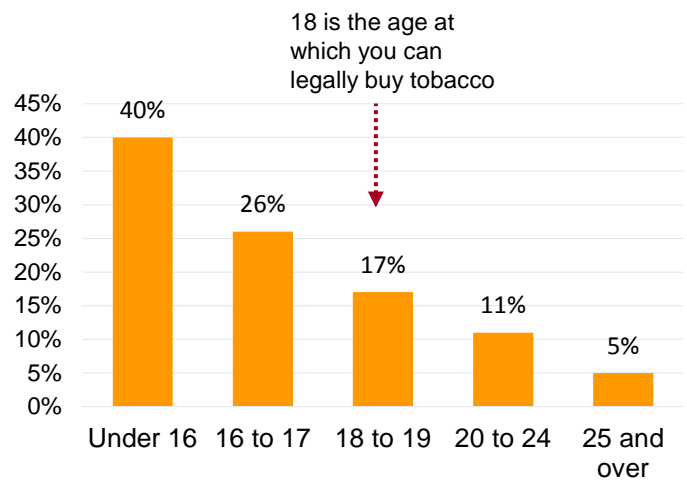
The tobacco industry needs over 200,000 new smokers each year to replace those who quit or die.

It is estimated that hundreds of children in the UK start smoking every day. ([Hopkinson et al child uptake of smoking by area across the UK, 2013](#))

Very few adults take up smoking for the first time. [Two thirds](#) of smokers say they began before they were legally old enough to buy cigarettes and [9 out of 10 before the age of 19](#).

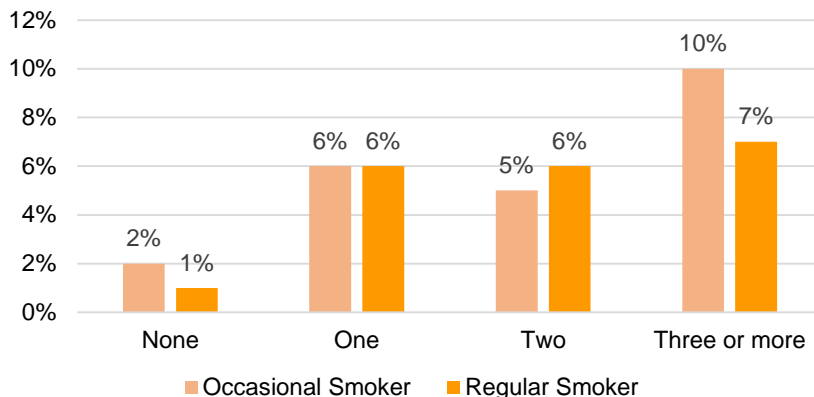
Research shows that by the age of 20, 80% of smokers regret they ever started ([Jarvis M. et. al. 2004](#)).

**Age at starting smoking**  
([Statistics on Smoking, England 2015](#))



## Smoking status by exposure to smoking

Smoking status by number of smokers pupil lives with ([Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England 2016](#))



Children living with smokers are [much more likely to start smoking](#) themselves.

Parental smoking is strongly linked with smoking in adolescence and in later life and children with at least one parent who smoke are 72% more likely to smoke in adolescence. ([RCP, Passive smoke and children, 2010](#))

The [Liverpool Longitudinal Study on Smoking](#) found 99% of 16 year olds regular smokers lived in a household with at least one smoker.

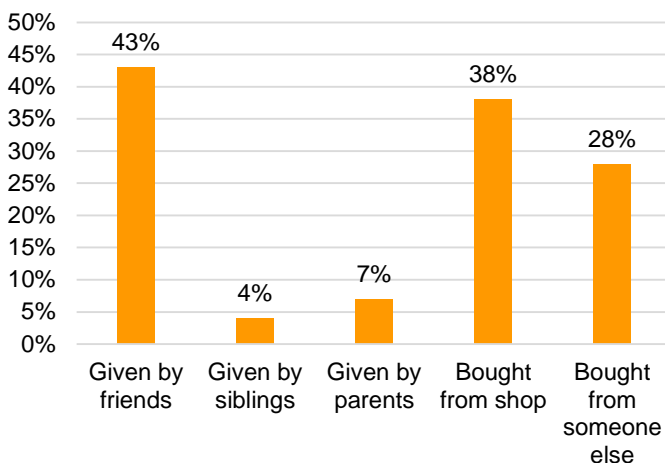
## A smoking environment encourages young smokers

Most children don't like tobacco smoke and don't like their parents smoking, but by the age of 15, 7% are regular smokers (NHS Digital. [Smoking drinking and drug use among young people in England 2016](#)).

Children who smoke are most likely to get their cigarettes from other people, normally their friends.

Efforts to stop children taking up smoking are much less effective for children surrounded by people who smoke and think it is normal. The best way to stop children from smoking is to get those around them, particularly their parents, to quit.

### Main Source of cigarettes for regular smokers aged 11-15 years (NHS Digital [Smoking drinking and drug use among young people in England 2016](#)).



## Passive smoking harms the health of children

**'If you smoke, I smoke'**

(Department of Health campaign)



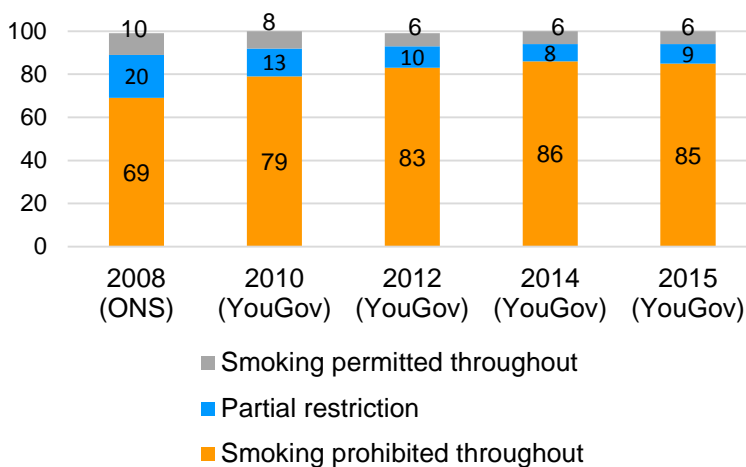
Growing up around smoke puts children at a major health disadvantage in life whatever their background.

It is estimated that passive smoke increases the incidence of childhood asthma by as much as 50% and results in 20,000 cases of lower respiratory tract infection each year. ([RCP, Passive smoke and children, 2010](#)).

Exposure to secondhand smoke in childhood can also lead to long term respiratory problems, including an increased risk of chronic respiratory illness and lung function deficits in later life.

## Smokefree homes are the accepted 'norm'

Percentage of adults reporting that their homes are smokefree



The message that tobacco smoke harms children is understood and acted on by most households. But significant numbers of children are still exposed to secondhand smoke.

In 2016 57% of pupils reported exposure to secondhand smoke in either their own or someone else's home. Over a quarter (26%) of pupils report exposure to secondhand smoke in the car, a decrease of 12% since 2014 (NHS Digital [Smoking drinking and drug use among young people in England 2016](#)).

If we are to eliminate health inequalities we need to ensure that children grow up free from tobacco smoke.

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