

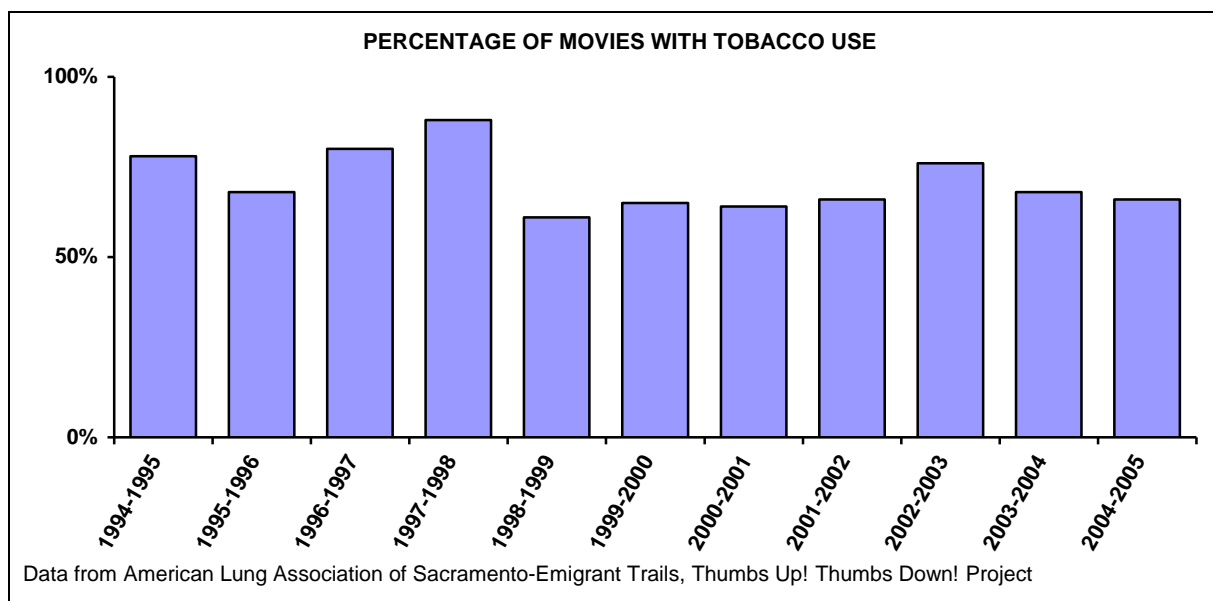


THE IMPACT OF SMOKING IN THE MOVIES ON YOUTH SMOKING

Although the 1998 state Master Settlement Agreement with the cigarette companies prohibits any payments by the cigarette companies to place their products in movies or television programs, the smoking imagery in U.S. films persists.^{*} Research studies and surveys have documented the volume of smoking and related product placements in movies and how exposure to this imagery increases smoking levels among kids. Policies to reduce youth exposure to smoking in movies, such as reducing tobacco imagery in movies, imposing parental, and showing anti-tobacco ads before movies that depict smoking will reduce the acceptability of smoking and contribute to reductions in tobacco use among youth.

The Amount of Smoking in the Movies

- The amount of smoking imagery in movies has declined over time. A 2011 study found that the number of top-grossing movies with tobacco incidents (defined as “the use or implied use of a tobacco product by an actor”) fell from 66.6 percent in 2005 to 45.3 percent in 2010. Similarly, among youth-rated movies (G, PG, or PG-13), the number of those with tobacco incidents fell from 54.8 percent in 2005 to 30.7 percent in 2010. The study also found that the number of onscreen tobacco incidents in youth-rated movies decreased 71.6 percent, from 2,093 incidents in 2005 to 595 incidents in 2010.¹
- A review of 150 movies from 2002 to 2005 by California teenagers found that 70 percent included tobacco use. Of all the movies, 26 percent had anti-tobacco messages; but 55 percent had pro-tobacco messages. In 80 percent of the movies with smoking, one or more leading actors smoked.² [However, in California from 2002 to 2005, actual smoking rates among adults declined from 15.8 to 14 percent.³] Although there are fewer movies with tobacco use more recently than in the mid-1990s, at least two-thirds of movies that youth see still contain tobacco use. The table below shows the trend for the past 11 years.



^{*} “III.(e) Prohibition on Payments Related to Tobacco Products and Media. No Participating Manufacturer may, beginning 30 days after the MSA Execution Date, make, or cause to be made, any payment or other consideration to any other person or entity to use, display, make reference to or use as a prop any Tobacco Product, Tobacco Product package, advertisement for a Tobacco Product, or any other item bearing a Brand Name in any motion picture, television show, theatrical production or other live performance, live or recorded performance of music, commercial film or video, or video game (“Media”) . . .” [Master Settlement Agreement, November 23, 1998, <http://www.naag.org/tobacco.php>.]

- A review of the top 100 box office hits showed that the trend of tobacco use appearing in youth-rated movies (G, PG-13, PG) declined significantly between 1996 and 2004, but almost three out of four youth-rated movies still showed tobacco use in 2004.⁴
- A 2000 study of 50 movies featuring 10 popular actresses found that leading female actors were just as likely to smoke in PG/PG-13 Movies as in R-rated movies (although the male actors were more than twice as likely to smoke in the R-rated movies); and the PG/PG-13 movies were less likely than the R movies to contain negative messages about smoking.⁵ A review of tobacco use among 43 stars appearing in films from 1994 to 1996 found that 65 percent used tobacco at least once and 42 percent portrayed smoking as an essential character trait in at least one or more films.⁶
- A 1999 study of 50 G-rated children's animated films released from 1937 to 1997 found that 56 percent portrayed at least one or more episodes of tobacco use, including 100 percent of all releases in 1996 and 1997. 76 characters in the 50 movies smoked (usually cigars), with good characters just as likely to smoke as bad characters.⁷
- An analysis of a random sample of the top-five grossing films in the United States, each year, found that smoking in movies fell from the 1960s to the 1980s then increased during the 1990s, with the increase continuing in 2000. In 2000, there were, on average, 10.9 instances of smoking per hour in the top-grossing films compared to 7.3 instances per hour in 1960.⁸ In contrast, adult smoking rates declined from the mid 1960s through the 1980s and have been basically flat or declining since.⁹

Smoking in movies increases youth smoking.

- In an exhaustive review of relevant studies, a comprehensive report released in June 2008 by the National Cancer Institute, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, concluded that smoking in movies is causally linked to youth smoking initiation.¹⁰ Smoking in movies affects how youth and adults view the social acceptability of smoking and perceptions of the functions of smoking, as well as its consequences.
- A review from 1991 to 2008 revealed that in movies that showed tobacco brands, Philip Morris USA's Marlboro was the brand shown most often (56% of all brand appearances).¹¹ It is also the preferred brand by youth – the most recent survey available shows that 43.3 percent of middle school smokers and 52.3 percent of high school smokers report Marlboro as their usual brand of cigarettes.¹²
- In a 1999 survey of more than 4,900 school children aged nine to fifteen in Vermont and New Hampshire, those who had been exposed to more incidents of smoking in the films they recalled seeing were much more likely to have tried smoking (even after adjusting for other factors associated with smoking and smoking initiation or experimentation). The kids were asked which of 50 movies from a randomly chosen list of recent movies they had seen, and only 4.9 percent of kids who had seen zero to 50 incidences of smoking in the movies they had seen from that sample had tried smoking, compared to 13.7 percent who had seen 51 to 100 incidences of smoking, 22.1 percent who had seen 101 to 150, and 31.3 percent who had seen more than 150. In other words, those with the heaviest exposure to smoking through the movies they attended were more than two and a half times more likely to have tried smoking than those with the least exposure to smoking in movies.¹³
- A 2002 study reported that a survey of more than 3,700 middle school students found that among those who had never smoked, the more movies they had seen with smoking the more susceptible to future smoking they were and the more likely they were to have positive expectations about smoking and to think that most adults smoke.¹⁴ Similarly, a 1999 study of 800 ninth graders (14 and 15 year olds) watching either original movie footage with smoking in it or the same movie with the smoking edited out found that those watching the movie with the smoking included had enhanced perceptions of smokers' social status and increased intentions to smoke.¹⁵
- A 2002 study of more than 4,500 students in 5th through 8th grades found that kids whose parents let them watch R-rated movies (which have the highest levels of smoking) are more than 15 times more likely to have tried smoking than those whose parents do not let them watch such movies (35 percent vs. 2 percent).¹⁶ Even after controlling for other factors that influence youth smoking, those allowed to watch R-rated films were still almost four times as likely to have tried smoking as those whose parents did not allow them to watch R-rated movies.

Anti-smoking messages in movies reduces youth favorability towards smoking.

- A follow-up to the previously described experiment with 800 ninth graders found that showing an anti-smoking ad prior to movies with smoking scenes nullified the pro-smoking effect of those movies (basically changing smoking from an attractive “forbidden fruit” to a tainted product).¹⁷
- In Australia, viewers of the movies *The Insider* (which featured unethical conduct by the tobacco industry and information about the negative health effects from smoking) and *Erin Brockovich* (a similar anti-big-corporation movie without any anti-tobacco themes or information) each had strong and pervasive negative views of the tobacco industry. But after seeing the respective films, viewers of *The Insider* had even more negative views of the tobacco industry than the viewers of the other film. Over the short term, those who saw *The Insider* (including smokers, former smokers, and nonsmokers) also had more sharply reduced intentions to smoke in the future.¹⁸

Attitudes and practices regarding tobacco use and showing it in movies varies, and tobacco use can appear in a movie because of the script, the director, the actors, or the movie studio.

- Currently, three of the six major movie companies that are members of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) have policies to reduce tobacco use in their movies. Youth-rated (G, PG, PG-13) movies released from those studios reduced the number of tobacco incidents per movie by 95.8 percent between 2005 and 2010. In contrast, youth-rated movies released by the three movie companies that are members of the MPAA, but without tobacco policies, as well as by independent movie companies (non-MPAA members), showed only a 41.7 percent decline in the number of tobacco incidents per movie.¹⁹
- In-depth interviews with a sample of 54 writers, actors, directors, producers, studio executives, and other movie industry people found widely divergent views on the extent of tobacco use and how it is portrayed in movies, the effect of tobacco use in movies on youth smoking decisions, whether movies should restrict portrayals of tobacco use in movies, and the necessity of portraying tobacco use in movies for certain creative purposes. It also found that tobacco use in films can originate with the writers, actors, or directors, and is included most often, according to the respondents, to elucidate character or portray reality (with actors’ on-screen tobacco use influenced by their off-screen tobacco use).²⁰
- Smoking in movies is an international issue. Article 13 of the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control, which requires comprehensive advertising bans, could be interpreted to include movies. China’s government has announced steps to reduce smoking in movies²¹ and India’s ban on smoking in movies was challenged in court and struck down in 2009.²²

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, August 1, 2011 / Ann Boonn

For more on this issue, visit:

- University of California at San Francisco’s Smoke Free Movies project, <http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/index.html>
- The American Legacy Foundation’s Smoke Free Movies Campaign, <http://www.legacyforhealth.org/2017.aspx>
- Breathe California of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails’s Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! project, <http://www.scenesmoking.org/frame.htm>
- World Health Organization’s Smoke Free Movies Initiative, http://www.who.int/tobacco/smoke_free_movies/en/index.html

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Smoking in Top-Grossing Movies—United States, 2010,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 60(27):909-913, July 15, 2011, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm6027.pdf>.

² Breathe California of Sacramento-Emigrant-Trails, *The 2004-2005 Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! Analysis of Tobacco Use in Movies; Eleven Year Trend Analysis Report*, <http://www.scenesmoking.org/TUTD%20Db%2094-95%20to%2004-05.pdf>.

³ California Department of Health Services, Tobacco Control Section, April 2006, <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Tobacco/Documents/CTCPAdultSmoking06.pdf>.

⁴ American Legacy Foundation, *Trends in Top Box Office Movie Tobacco Use, 1996-2004*, First Look Report 16, July 2006, http://americanlegacy.org/PDF/Trends_in_Top_Box_Office_Movie_Tobacco_Use_1994-2004.pdf.

- ⁵ Escamilla, G, et al., "Women and Smoking in Hollywood Movies: A Content Analysis," *American Journal of Public Health* 90(3):412-4, March 2000.
- ⁶ Tickle, J, et al., "Favourite Movie Stars, Their Tobacco Use in Contemporary Movies, and Its Association with Adolescent Smoking," *Tobacco Control* 10:16-22, 2001.
- ⁷ Goldstein, A, et al., "Tobacco and Alcohol Use in G-Rated Children's Animated Films," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 181(12):1131-36, March 1999.
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- ⁹ CDC, NCHS, *National Health Interview Surveys*, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm.
- ¹⁰ National Cancer Institute, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 19, NIH Pub. No. 07-6242, June 2008, http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/19/m19_complete.pdf.
- ¹¹ Titus, K, Polansky, JR, & Glantz, S, *Smoking Presentation Trends in U.S. Movies 1991-2008*, Breathe California of Sacramento-Emigrant-Trails and Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education at the University of California, San Francisco, February 2009, <http://www.scenesmoking.org/research/Film%20Smoking%20Trends%2091-08.pdf>.
- ¹² CDC, "Cigarette Brand Preference Among Middle and High School Students Who Are Established Smokers—United States, 2004 and 2006," *MMWR* 58(05):112-115, February 13, 2009, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5805a3.htm>.
- ¹³ Sargent, J, et al., "Effect of Seeing Tobacco use in Films on Trying Smoking Among Adolescents: Cross Sectional Study," *British Medical Journal* 323:1-6, December 15, 2001, <http://bmj.com/cgi/reprint/323/7326/1394.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ Sargent, JD, et al., "Viewing Tobacco Use in Movies. Does It Shape Attitudes that Mediate Adolescent Smoking?," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22(3):137-45, April 2002.
- ¹⁵ Pechmann, C & Shih, CF, "Smoking Scenes in Movies and Antismoking Advertisements Before Movies: Effects on Youth," *Journal of Marketing*, 63:1-13, July 1999.
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- ¹⁷ Pechmann, C & Shih, CF, "Smoking Scenes in Movies and Antismoking Advertisements Before Movies: Effects on Youth," *Journal of Marketing*, 63:1-13, July 1999.
- ¹⁸ Dixon, H, et al., "Public Reaction to the Portrayal of the Tobacco Industry in the Film *The Insider*," *Tobacco Control* 10: 285-91, 2001 [study done in Australia].
- ¹⁹ Glantz, SA, et al., "Smoking in Top-Grossing Movies—United States, 2010," *MMWR* 60(27):909-913, July 15, 2011, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm6027.pdf>.
- ²⁰ Shields, D, et al., "Hollywood on Tobacco: How the Entertainment Industry Understands Tobacco Portrayal," *Tobacco Control* 8:378-86, 1999.
- ²¹ China's State Administration for Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) General Office, Circular on Strictly Controlling Smoking Scenes in Films and Television Programs [in Chinese], February 12, 2011, <http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2011/02/12/20110212111852140005.html>.
- ²² World Health Organization, *Smoke-free movies: from evidence to action*, 2009, http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2009/9789241597937_eng.pdf.