

The Burden of Tobacco Use

(From the Centers For Disease Control Web Site)

An estimated 45.8 million adults in the United States smoke cigarettes even though this single behavior will result in death or disability for half of all regular smokers. Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, resulting in approximately 440,000 deaths each year. More than 8.6 million people in the United States have at least one serious illness caused by smoking. If current patterns of smoking persist, 6.4 million people currently younger than 18 will die prematurely of a tobacco-related disease. Paralleling this enormous health toll is the economic burden of tobacco use: more than \$75 billion per year in medical expenditures and another \$80 billion per year resulting from lost productivity.

Since 1964, 28 Surgeon General's reports on smoking and health have concluded that tobacco use is the single most avoidable cause of disease, disability, and death in the United States. Over the past four decades, cigarette smoking has caused an estimated 12 million deaths, including 4.1 million deaths from cancer, 5.5 million deaths from cardiovascular diseases, 2.1 million deaths from respiratory diseases, and 94,000 infant deaths related to mothers smoking during pregnancy.

Smokeless tobacco, cigars, and pipes also have deadly consequences, including lung, larynx,

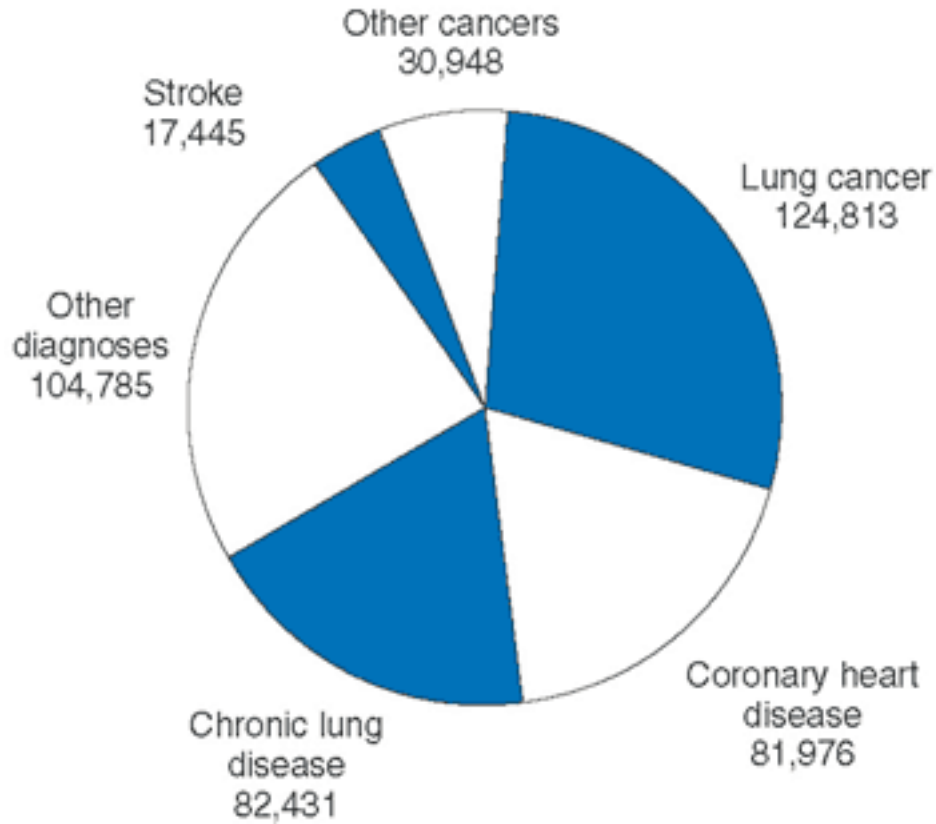
esophageal, and oral cancers. Low-tar cigarettes and other tobacco products are not safe alternatives.

The harmful effects of smoking do not end with the smoker. Babies of women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to have lower birth weights, an increased risk of death from sudden infant death syndrome, and respiratory distress. In addition, secondhand smoke has harmful effects on nonsmokers. Each year, primarily because of exposure to secondhand smoke, an estimated 3,000 nonsmoking Americans die of lung cancer, and more than 35,000 die of heart disease.

An estimated 150,000–300,000 children younger than 18 months of age have lower respiratory tract infections because of exposure to secondhand smoke.

Although smoking rates fell among high school students from 2000 to 2002, they did not decline significantly among middle school students. This lack of progress suggests the need for greater use of proven antismoking strategies and for new strategies to promote further declines in youth smoking.

442,398 U.S. Deaths Attributable Each Year to Cigarette Smoking*



*Average annual number of deaths, 1995–1999.
Source: *MMWR* 2002;51(14):300–3.