4. RISK FACTORS FOR HEALTH

Smoking among adults

The health consequences of tobacco smoking are numerous, and include cancers, stroke, and coronary heart disease, among others. It is also an important contributory factor for respiratory diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), while smoking among pregnant women can lead to low birth weight and illnesses among infants. Smoking causes the largest share of overall years of healthy life lost in 15 OECD countries, and ranks second in another 16 OECD countries (Forouzanfar et al., 2016). The WHO has estimated that tobacco smoking kills 7 million people per year across the world, of which 890,000 are due to second-hand smoke. It is the leading cause of death, illness and impoverishment.

Across the OECD, just over 18% of adults smoke tobacco daily (14% of women and 23% of men) (Figure 4.1). Rates are highest in Greece, Hungary and Turkey, as well as Indonesia (over 25%), and lowest in Mexico as well as Brazil (under 10%). Women smoke the most in Austria, Greece and Hungary, where rates exceed 20%, while they smoke the least in Korea and Mexico, as well as China, India, and Indonesia, where rates are below 5%. In men, rates are highest in Turkey as well as China, Indonesia, and the Russian Federation (exceeding 40%), while they are below 10% in Iceland as well as Brazil. Men smoke more than women in all countries except Denmark and Iceland, where the gender gap is about one percentage point. In other countries, the gender gap ranges from below 2 points in Sweden and the United States, to over 30 points in China (46 points), Indonesia (73 points) and the Russian Federation (34 points).

Daily smoking has decreased in most OECD countries since 2000, although rates have slightly risen in the Slovak Republic (+0.8 points), have greatly increased in Indonesia (+8.8 points), and have not changed in Austria (Figure 4.2). In 2015, an average of 18% of adults smoked daily in the OECD, as opposed to 26% in 2000, equivalent to a 28% drop. The strongest decreases occurred in Denmark, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, as well as Brazil, India, Lithuania and the Russian Federation, where they exceeded 10 percentage points, and in Norway, where the drop was 20 points. In 2015, rates were highest in Greece, Hungary, Turkey and Indonesia (over 25%), while they were lowest in Mexico and Brazil (under 10%).

Raising taxes on tobacco is the most effective way to reduce tobacco use (WHO, 2015). High levels of taxes as well as stringent policies led to strong reductions in smoking rates between 1996 and 2011 in many OECD countries (OECD, 2015). In 2014, 29 OECD countries applied tobacco advertising bans on at least national television, print media and radio, while 26 countries applied taxation rates of at least 70% (WHO, 2015). In all OECD countries, packages displayed at least a medium-sized a health warning. Every year on May 31st, “World No Tobacco Day” advocates for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption, and highlights the health and additional risks associated with tobacco use. The theme for 2017 was “Tobacco – a threat to development”, and focused on the threats of the industry to the sustainable development of countries.

Definition and comparability

The proportion of daily smokers is defined as the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who report tobacco smoking every day. Other forms of smokeless tobacco products, such as snuff in Sweden, are not taken into account. This indicator is more representative of the smoking population than the average number of cigarettes smoked per day, as the act of smoking is more determining than the quantity. Most countries report data for the population aged 15+, but there are some exceptions as highlighted in the data source of the OECD Health Statistics database.

References


4.1. Adult population smoking daily by gender, 2015 (or nearest year)

% of population aged 15 years and over


StatLink http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933602709

4.2. Adult population smoking daily, 2000 and 2015 (or nearest year)

% of population aged 15 years and over


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