



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**  
Dave Chokshi, MD  
Commissioner

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Monday, December 21, 2020**

## **Adult Smoking Rate in NYC Declines; Reaches Take Care New York 2020 Target**

*Smoking may intensify the risk and symptoms of COVID-19*

*NYS Smokers Quitline is offering up to three months of free nicotine gum*

**December 21, 2020** — The Health Department today announced that results from the 2019 Community Health Survey show an adult smoking prevalence of 11.9%, a decrease from 14.3% in 2015 and 21.5% in 2002. This meets the smoking target of less than 12% in Take Care New York 2020, which is the City's blueprint for giving everyone the chance to live a healthier life. Its aim is to improve every community's health, especially among those experiencing the greatest health inequities.

“More New Yorkers than ever have extinguished their smoking habit – or never even picked it up – and we’re all healthier for it,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Dave A. Chokshi**. “But with the ongoing impact of COVID-19, all New Yorkers can take additional steps to protect their health. If you smoke, it’s a great time to try to quit and we’ve got your back with resources to make it easier.”

Smoking increases the risk of respiratory infections and pneumonia, as well the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Smoking is also known to cause heart disease, stroke, type-2 diabetes, many cancers and lung diseases such as emphysema.

In 2017, Mayor Bill de Blasio signed several bills to address tobacco and e-cigarette use, as well as secondhand smoke exposure. These policies included banning the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies; raising the minimum prices for all tobacco products; capping the number of tobacco and e-cigarette retailers citywide; and promoting smoke-free spaces in residential settings.

While these improvements are impressive, troubling inequities exist. In 2019, adults with less than a high school education were twice as likely to smoke as those with a college degree (15.6% vs. 7.4%). Men were more likely to smoke than women (14.7% vs. 9.3%). Smoking was also particularly high among adults with serious psychological distress (SPD), compared to adults without SPD (26.7% vs. 11.0%) Historically, the tobacco and vaping industry have resisted increased regulation and oversight, while also using manipulative marketing tactics to target youth and specific communities, which have contributed to these inequities.

For decades, New York City has been a leader in tobacco control policies, reducing the rates of smoking among youth and adults, with policies including the Smoke Free Air Act and raising the minimum age for tobacco sales to 21.

E-cigarettes are an ongoing area of concern, with 10.4% of 18-24-year-olds and 7.5% of 25-44-year-olds reporting current vaping. Vaping is now much more common among 18-24-year-olds than smoking (4.8%). White New Yorkers are two to three times more likely to use e-cigarettes (9%) than New Yorkers from other racial and ethnic groups. In response to the popularity of e-cigarettes among youth, this year, both the city and the state adopted laws prohibiting the sale of flavored [electronic cigarettes](#). This will help protect young people from developing nicotine dependence and drive down the rate of adult smoking further because few people start smoking as adults. For support quitting, teens and young adults (ages 13 to 24) can text “DROPTHEVAPE” to 88709 to join [This Is Quitting](#), a free Truth Initiative texting support program

The New York City Community Health Survey (CHS) is a telephone survey conducted annually by the Health Department. The 2019 sample included approximately 8,800 randomly selected adults aged 18 and older from all five boroughs. Interviews are conducted in English, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese). In 2018, additional languages were added, including Bengali and Haitian Creole.

The best thing people who smoke or vape can do is to stop. Using counseling and cessation medications, such as nicotine patches and lozenges, can double the chances of quitting successfully. The [New York State Smokers Quitline](#) is available to help online at nysmokefree.com or by phone at 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487). While supplies last, up to three months of nicotine replacement gum is available for free to those who qualify.

New Yorkers can also talk to their health care provider about medication and counseling options. Most health insurance plans, including Medicaid, cover services to help you quit.

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