

## Health Watch -- Teens and Smoking

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There's a new trend in teenage smoking rates. Is it a trend that can last?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been tracking cigarette smoking among high school students since 1991, and this year's report had some good news in it. Smoking rates among students in grades nine through twelve were at their lowest point in 13 years.

In 2003, about 22 percent of high school students were considered smokers. That means they smoked at least once in the month prior to the survey. That's compared to more than 28 percent in 2001 and the highest level reported, more than 36 percent in 1997. Although the trend is encouraging, it should be noted that about 22 percent of American adults are considered current smokers – so teens are still smoking at the same rate as adults.

The percentage of frequent smokers – those who reported smoking on at least 20 of the 30 days prior to the survey – was down, as well, from nearly 14 percent to just under 10 percent. Health officials believe higher cigarette costs and public education campaigns are what made the difference, but they worry that decreased government funding for anti-smoking education may reverse the positive trend.

Doctors at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas say there's one influence stronger than prices or anti-smoking ads when it comes to whether or not kids smoke: their parents. Children of smokers are much more likely to pick up the habit than children of non-smokers. [Dr. Adi Gazdar](#), a UT Southwestern lung cancer specialist, says it's easier never to pick up the habit than to try to break it.

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