



Tobacco

background information for educators

What is tobacco?

- Also known as: Cigarettes, Cigs, Smokes, Darts, Chew, Spit, Snuff, Dip, Shisha, Hookah
- Tobacco comes from the leaves of the tobacco plant (*Nicotiana tabacum* and *Nicotiana rustica*). The leaves are dried, cured, and fermented to make commercial tobacco products.

Acknowledgement

- Mentions of 'tobacco' throughout this document refer to commercial tobacco products and not sacred or ceremonial tobacco.
- Many First Nations, Métis and urban Indigenous peoples have a sacred and ceremonial relationship with traditional tobacco.

Methods of using tobacco



Cigarettes

- Made from fine-cut tobacco leaves and wrapped in paper, sometimes with a filter at one end. The non-filtered end is lit with a flame and smoke is inhaled through the filtered end.



Cigars

- Tobacco leaf is wrapped around a tobacco-leaf filling forming a cylinder type role. One end is cut off, the cigar is lit, and smoke is drawn into the mouth without inhaling.



Cigarillos

- Short, narrow cigars where the dried tobacco is wrapped in tobacco leaves and is usually made without a filter. Like cigars, one end is lit, and smoke is drawn into the mouth without inhaling into the lungs.



Hookah

- Hookah is a water-pipe where charcoal burns moist tobacco called shisha (often containing nicotine) to produce smoke. Smoke is pulled through the water bowl, passes through a rubber tube that ends in a mouthpiece. A person uses the mouthpiece to breathe in the smoke.

Why is youth tobacco use a concern?



Brain development

- Tobacco products contain nicotine. Youth are particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of nicotine as their brains are not fully developed until their mid-20s. Nicotine can alter brain development and may affect memory, learning and attention, and increase susceptibility to nicotine dependence.



Nicotine addiction

- Nicotine is one of the most addictive substances in the world and it is the main reason people continue to use tobacco.
- The reward system in the brain is heightened during adolescence which can lead to youth becoming dependent on nicotine faster than adults.
- Kids not only get nicotine from using tobacco but also by vaping. Please refer to [Vaping background information for educators](#).



Second-hand smoke

- The exhaling of tobacco smoke is called second-hand smoke. Exposure to second-hand smoke creates serious health risks for others, including heart and lung diseases, cancer, and generally poor health.
- Second-hand smoke is especially dangerous for children as their lungs are still developing.



Chemical make-up of cigarettes

One cigarette contains over 4,000 chemicals, 70 of which are known to cause cancer.

Some of these include:

- **Nicotine:** Found naturally in the tobacco leaf, nicotine is the chemical that makes tobacco products so addictive.
- **Carbon Monoxide:** A poisonous gas produced from burning a tobacco product.
- **Tar:** A thick, dark, tacky liquid created as a by-product of smoking tobacco that sticks to skin, clothing, and the inside of lungs.
- **Additional harmful chemicals:** These occur when tobacco products are burned and include acetone, ammonia, arsenic, butane, formaldehyde, lead, methanol, and many more.



Long-term health effects

- Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of premature death and disease in Canada.
- In addition to nicotine dependence, some of the long-term health effects of tobacco use include cancer, lung and heart diseases, diabetes, and increase risk for reproductive, bone, and immune system conditions.

References:

[Tobacco use and addiction - Health Canada](#)

[Tobacco scientific facts - Health Canada](#)

[Toxins in tobacco smoke - Health Canada](#)

[Health effects of smoking and second-hand smoke - Health Canada](#)

Tobacco and stress

Tobacco use may increase during periods of high stress (e.g. studying for exams), but it is not an effective coping tool.

While using tobacco, nicotine reaches the brain causing dopamine to be released creating a sense of pleasure and temporary feeling of stress relief.

However, using tobacco does not actually help the body to relax. After tobacco use, the body responds by increasing blood pressure and heart rate, tensing muscles, resulting in less oxygen being available to the body and brain.



Some healthier ways to cope with stress include:



- Breathing exercises
- Exercising
- Seeking support for mental health and well-being
- Healthy eating
- Enjoying hobbies
- Spending quality time with friends and family
- Getting enough sleep (9-11 hours /night for 5–13-year-olds, and 8-10 hours /night for 14-17 year-olds)

References:

[Stress Management and Coping - School Mental Health Ontario](#)

[Canada's Food Guide - Health Canada](#)

[Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth \(ages 5-17 years\) - Health Canada](#)

Why youth might smoke

There are many factors as to why youth may start and continue smoking, including:

- Role modeling from parents/guardians who use tobacco products
- Perceived stress reduction
- Peer pressure – youth encouraged by friends to try cigarettes and to keep smoking
- A way to rebel and show independence
- Curiosity
- Nicotine dependence



Did you know?



Industry tactics

Despite bans on tobacco advertising, the industry uses discreet marketing tactics to promote use, like on-screen smoking.

- Paid tobacco product advertisement is prohibited in Canada. However, children and youth are still exposed to tobacco imagery through movies, TV, music videos, video games, etc. Smoking is often depicted as edgy, cool, or risk-taking without showing consequences of use.
- Research has shown that youth who watch scenes of smoking are more likely to initiate tobacco use.



Local laws

• In Ontario, it is prohibited to:

- Sell or supply tobacco products or accessories to anyone under 19 years old.
- Smoke or vape on school and child care centre properties, and within 20 metres of any point on the perimeter of the facility.
- Smoke or vape with a person under 16 years of age in a car.

• In Peel, it is prohibited to:

- Smoke or vape any substance in outdoor public places, municipal properties and construction sites.
- Smoke or vape within 9 metres of any indoor public space and workplace.



Environmental impacts

Tobacco products are not only harmful to humans, but the environment as well. When a cigarette is smoked, the used filter remains and is referred to as a cigarette butt.

- They are made of plastic (acetate), can remain in the environment for many years, and are a threat to water systems, fish, and animals.
- Globally, cigarette butts are the second most common type of litter after food wrappers, exceeding plastic bags and straws.

References:

[Tobacco in pop culture - Truth Initiative](#)
[The Smoke-Free Ontario Act 2017](#)
[No Smoking and Vaping in Outdoor Public Places and Workplaces By-law 49-2019](#)
[Post-Consumer Waste of Tobacco and Vaping Products - Public Health Ontario](#)
[Tobacco and the environment fact sheet - Truth Initiative](#)

Myths and facts

Myth	Fact
"No one smokes anymore."	<p>Nicotine addiction is the key reason why people continue to smoke.</p> <p>Even though Canada has seen a steady decline in smoking rates, millions of Canadians still smoke, and many initiated during adolescence.</p> <p>The average number of times it takes to quit successfully = 30. Quitting Smoking in Ontario (Ontario Tobacco Research Unit)</p>
"Occasional smoking isn't harmful."	<p>Light, occasional, and social smoking can have similar health risks as heavier smoking patterns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On average, every cigarette could shorten a person's life by 11 minutes. • Some youth may show signs of nicotine dependence even if they are smoking 1 cigarette a month. • Youth who smoke occasionally can develop weaker and smaller lungs that may not grow fully or perform to their best potential. (Occasional & Social Smoking – SmokefreeTeen)
"Hookah is safer than cigarettes."	<p>People who smoke tobacco using a hookah may absorb more of the toxic substances (than people who smoke cigarettes) because of the way hookahs are used. (Hookahs – CDC)</p> <p>In a typical 1-hour hookah smoking session, users may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhale 100–200x the amount of smoke compared to a single cigarette • Be exposed to up to 9x the carbon monoxide of a single cigarette • Be exposed to 1.7x the nicotine of a single cigarette • Poor indoor air quality and exposure to second hand hookah smoke can also be a health risk to others as they breathe in smoke from the tobacco as well as from the heat source (e.g. charcoal smoke) for the hookah. • Sharing a waterpipe can also put users at greater risk of contracting infectious diseases. (Health Impacts of Waterpipe Smoking and Exposure – PHO)

Statistics on tobacco use

- [Peel Public Health: Health Status Data](#) - Region of Peel
- [Ontario Student Drug Use and Mental Health Survey \(OSDUHS\)](#) - CAMH

Related resources and supports

- [Alcohol, tobacco, and other substances](#) - Region of Peel
- [Tobacco overview](#) - Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)
- [Preventing kids and teens from smoking and vaping; Tobacco and addiction - Canada.ca](#) - Health Canada
- [Respecting tobacco: ceremonial vs. commercial tobacco use?](#) - The Lung Association
- [WhereToStart.ca](#) - Access to Mental Health Services for Children and Youth in Peel
- [Kids Help Phone](#) - Kids Help Phone answers common questions about smoking
- [Smoker's Help Line](#) - Canadian Cancer Society
- [Quash](#) - Lung Health Foundation - Smoking and vaping cessation app for youth