

## Smokeless tobacco

June 2008

This profile highlights material from AADAC's third edition of the *Tobacco Basics Handbook*,<sup>1</sup> which provides information on current tobacco issues.

### *What is smokeless tobacco?*

Smokeless tobacco is a form of tobacco that is used without burning; it is placed in the mouth or nose, where the nicotine is absorbed into the body. Although much less common than cigarettes, smokeless tobacco products have a variety of negative health effects.

Smokeless tobacco comes in two basic forms: snuff and chewing tobacco. Snuff is finely ground tobacco, which may be dry or moist, or may be contained in small teabag-like pouches. Some snuff can be inhaled, but is more commonly held between the cheek and gum. Chewing tobacco is coarser than snuff and exists in three forms: loose leaf (sold in a soft package or pouch), plug (sold in a small block or brick form) and twist (dried tobacco leaves that are twisted into strands). The tobacco is chewed for several hours to get a continuous supply of nicotine.

### *What are the negative health effects of smokeless tobacco?*

Smokeless tobacco contains over 3,000 chemicals, including 28 known cancer-causing chemicals. Serious health problems that can be the result of using of smokeless tobacco include

- cancer of the mouth (including the lip, tongue, inner cheek, and floor and roof of the mouth), pharynx (throat), larynx (voice box), and esophagus
- leukoplakia (white, leathery patches that may develop where tobacco is held in the mouth, and may become cancerous)
- gum and tooth disease, leading to cavities, lost teeth and painful sores
- gum recession (where the gum pulls away from the teeth), loss of bone in the jaw, tooth abrasion (worn spots on the teeth), yellowing of teeth and chronic bad breath
- cardiovascular problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke

### *What are the rates of smokeless tobacco use among Albertans and Canadians?*

The results from the 2006 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS) indicate that many Albertans and Canadians had experimented with smokeless tobacco in their lives, and a small proportion had used it in the 30 days before the survey. As shown in Table 1, Albertans were more likely than Canadians to have tried smokeless tobacco at some point in their lives.

Table 1: Smokeless tobacco use among Albertans and Canadians

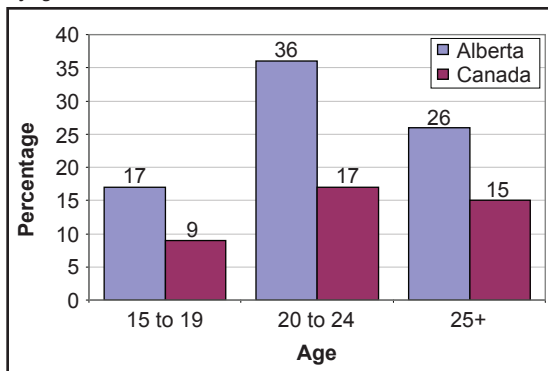
	Albertans	Canadians
Past 30 days	2% †	1% †
Lifetime	15%	8%

† Subject to moderate sampling variability; therefore, results should be interpreted with caution. Sampling variability measures the reliability of the estimate. Estimates with moderate sampling variability are less reliable than estimates with acceptable levels of sampling variability; however, these estimates are still useful indicators.

### *What is the link between smokeless tobacco use, and gender and age?*

In 2006, very few females reported smokeless tobacco experimentation; therefore, the rates are not shown in Figure 1. Among males, those in the 20- to 24-year-old age group reported the highest rates of experimentation with smokeless tobacco sometime in their lifetime: 36% of Albertans and 17% of Canadians (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Smokeless tobacco experimentation rates among males, by age

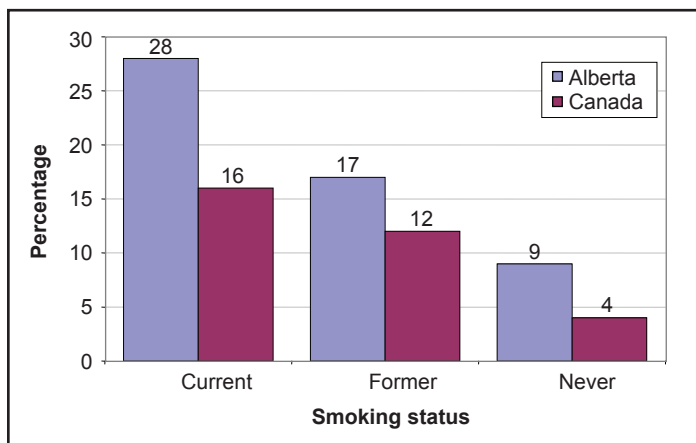


Source: Statistics Canada (2007). Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, 2006.

### What is the link between smokeless tobacco experimentation and smoking status?

Current smokers were more likely than former or never smokers to have tried smokeless tobacco in their lifetime, as shown in Figure 2. In the CTUMS survey, 28% of current smokers in Alberta and 16% of current smokers in Canada reported trying smokeless tobacco. The numbers for people who had never smoked, yet tried smokeless tobacco were much lower: 9% of Albertans and 4% of Canadians.

Figure 2: Smokeless tobacco experimentation rates and smoking status, Alberta and Canada, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada (2007). Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, 2006.

### Summary

- Smokeless tobacco is a form of tobacco that is used without burning.
- There are two basic forms of smokeless tobacco: snuff and chewing tobacco.
- Smokeless tobacco is linked to numerous health problems including cancer, cardiovascular problems, and gum and tooth disease.
- Smokeless tobacco experimentation is more common among Albertans than Canadians.
- Males aged 20 to 24 have the highest rates of smokeless tobacco experimentation.
- Current smokers are more likely than former or never smokers to have tried smokeless tobacco in their lifetime.

For further information, contact AADAC Research Services at 780-427-0116.

<sup>1</sup> Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. (2008). *Tobacco basics handbook: Third edition*. Edmonton, AB: Author.