



# How Tobacco Harms LGBTQ+ Communities

Protect yourself and the people you care about.

LGBTQ+ people use tobacco at higher rates compared to cisgender and heterosexual people. This is in part due to the unique stressors, barriers, and traumas that LGBTQ+ people often face.

## Tobacco use in LGBTQ+ communities

About 1 in 6 LGB adults and 1 in 3 transgender adults smoke cigarettes, compared to 1 in 9 cisgender heterosexual adults.

Compared to cisgender and heterosexual people who smoke, LGBT people who smoke are also more likely to:

- Smoke menthol cigarettes, which are often harder to quit than nonmenthol cigarettes
- Use little cigars and e-cigarettes

Among LGB people, bisexual women have the highest rates of tobacco use.

## Tobacco use in LGBTQ+ youth

Tobacco impacts LGBTQ+ teens and young adults, too. Compared to heterosexual youth, transgender youth:

- Are 4 times more likely to smoke cigarettes
- Are 3.5 times more likely to use smokeless tobacco

## Tobacco companies target LGBTQ+ communities.

Tobacco companies specifically target LGBTQ+ communities in their marketing, ads, and promotions.

- They often sponsor LGBTQ+ events such as bar nights and Pride celebrations to market to LGBTQ+ people.
- Tobacco companies also sponsor magazines and other media that feature LGBTQ+ people.
- In 1995, one tobacco company targeted gay men and the unhoused in a marketing campaign they called Project SCUM (Sub-Culture Urban Marketing).

Tobacco companies often use themes important to LGBTQ+ communities such as civil rights, authenticity, social connection, and acceptance to gain attention and trust.

**Nicotine from tobacco and vaping can harm brain growth in teens and young adults.**

## Other factors

LGBTQ+ people often face other disparities that increase their risk for tobacco use. They are more likely to:

- Not have health insurance or access to tobacco cessation counseling or medicines
- Be impacted by mental health problems
- Experience homelessness

## Lower your risk.

You can lower your risk for at least 12 different cancers and many other health problems.

- Don't smoke cigarettes, cigars, or pipes.
- Don't use smokeless tobacco products (such as chew, dip, and spit).
- Avoid secondhand smoke and indoor places where smoking is allowed. Don't let other people smoke in your car, room, or home.
- Encourage your friends and family to avoid tobacco and secondhand smoke, too.

## Quitting tobacco isn't easy.

Tobacco is addictive. It often takes people 5 to 7 tries before quitting smoking for good. Don't give up! Ask a health care provider for help. Or call us for tips and resources.

## E-cigarettes and vaping

Although e-cigarettes and other vaping devices don't contain tobacco, they do contain nicotine (which comes from tobacco). They may also contain:

- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs), chemicals that can cause headaches, nausea, and organ damage
- Chemicals known to cause cancer and other serious health problems
- Heavy metals
- Formaldehyde

More research is needed on the long-term health effects of vaping.



## If you quit smoking today, you'll feel a difference after:

- **20 minutes:** Your heart rate and blood pressure are lower.
- **A few days:** Carbon monoxide levels in your blood drop to normal.
- **2 weeks to 3 months:** Your circulation improves. Your lung function increases.
- **1 to 12 months:** Coughing and shortness of breath improve. Tiny hair-like structures (cilia) that move mucus out of your lungs start to regain normal function.
- **1 to 2 years:** Your risk of heart attack drops dramatically.
- **5 to 10 years:** Your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, and voice box (larynx) is cut in half. Your stroke risk decreases.
- **10 years:** Your risk of lung cancer is about half that of a person who is still smoking (after 10-15 years). Your risk of bladder, esophagus, and kidney cancer decreases.
- **15 years:** Your risk of heart disease is close to that of someone who doesn't smoke.



Visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/tobacco](https://cancer.org/tobacco) or call us at **1-800-227-2345** to learn more. We're here when you need us.