



# Valley Youth House

## *The Digest*

June 2010 Volume 6, Issue 11

### Cigarette Taxes May Not Affect All Smokers



**B**oosting cigarette taxes can cause smoking rates to plummet among people struggling with certain alcohol issues, drug and/or mental disorders, new research suggests.

The study authors found that raising the price of cigarettes by just 10 percent translates into more than an 18 percent drop in smoking among such individuals.

"Whatever we can do to reduce smoking is critical to the health of the U.S.," Dr. Michael Ong, a researcher at the Jonsson Cancer Center at the University of California Los Angeles, said. "Cigarette taxes are used as a key policy instrument to get people to quit smoking, so understanding whether people will really quit is important."

Ong and his colleagues will report their findings in an upcoming issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The authors noted that smoking is the leading cause of death in the United States.

The current finding stems from a 2000-2001 survey of more than 7,500 men and women, about 23 percent of whom had an alcohol, drug or mental health disorder in the year prior to being polled.

More than four in 10 in that subgroup were smokers, which the authors pointed out is a much higher percentage of smokers than is found among the general public.

Those who were alcohol-dependent did not reduce their cigarette consumption in response to price increases, Ong and his team observed. However, smokers who had binge-drinking problems, substance-abuse problems or mental health disorders were found to be more likely to kick the habit altogether if prices rose.

Nevertheless, the authors cautioned that more research is needed in order to confirm the price-habit connection among these particular groups of smokers.

[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_99658.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_99658.html)

#### *Inside this issue:*

High-Purity Heroin Spreading  
Into the Country 2

'Drinking' Vodka Through  
Your EYE for a Quick  
Buzz? 2

Tobacco Employees  
Using Facebook to  
Promote Brand? 3

1 in 5 College Students  
Admitted to Drunk  
Driving 3

U.S. Cigarettes Higher in  
Chemicals? 4



## High-Purity Heroin Spreading Into the Country

**A**n ultra-potent form of heroin that sells for as little as \$10 per bag has been making its way across the border from Mexico.

Improvements in poppy refinement by Mexican dealers have driven purity up and prices down. Heroin imported from Asia and the Middle East in the 1970s was around 5-percent pure; now federal agents report seizing drugs at purity levels of between 50 and 80 percent.

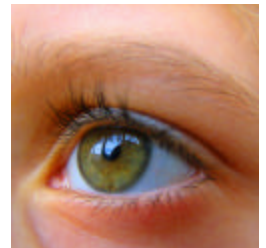
The potent heroin can kill unwary users almost instantly if they are accustomed to using weaker versions.

Independent smugglers are driving the new trade from Mexico. While the major cartels focus on marijuana and cocaine, smaller traffickers pay for access to the big cartels' smuggling routes.

According to the DEA, heroin seizures along the border quadrupled from 2008 to 2009. According to research, heroin deaths in the U.S. rose 20.3 percent between 2006 and 2008.

"We're seeing [heroin] sometimes 80-percent pure," said Oregon State Medical Examiner Karen Gunson. "If you're using it every day, your chances grow and grow that it's going to kill you."

<http://www.jointogether.org/news/headlines/inthenews/2010/ultra-pure-mexican-heroin.html>



## 'Drinking' Vodka Through Your EYE for a Quick Buzz?

**E**ven as drunken student antics go, it was, by any stretch of the imagination, a disturbing scene. Surrounded by cheering rugby players, applauded by fellow members of the university netball team, 19-year-old Melissa Fontaine tipped back her head and giggled as fellow drinkers in the Students' Union bar pulled apart her eyelids and allowed them to pour a shot of vodka into her left eye.

'Vodka eyeballing', as it is known in student circles, is the latest drinking craze to sweep through Britain's universities. Those who do it claim that it induces feelings of drunkenness at break-neck speeds, providing an instant high. But the devastating long-term damage it causes is becoming a major concern among doctors and university authorities who already worry that Britain's student drinking culture is out of control.

Melissa, who left university last summer and is now 22, believes they are right to be worried. Her constantly watering left eye has been left permanently scarred by her antics. More troubling still, she has been warned that her eyesight may deteriorate further as she gets older. 'I'm in constant pain because of what I did,' she says. 'And I'm terrified that it will get worse. I wish I could turn the clock back and change things. But I can't.'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1278583/Young-people-drinking-neat-vodka-EYE-quick-buzz.html>

## Tobacco Employees Using Facebook to Promote Brand?

Employees of British American Tobacco (BAT) are actively promoting the company's cigarette brands by administering Facebook groups, joining groups as fans, and posting promotional materials -- all violations of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control -- according to Australian researchers.

"The international tobacco-control community and governments should focus far greater attention on monitoring and documenting ways in which tobacco companies are utilizing online social-networking sites to promote smoking and brands," the researchers said.

Becky Freeman of the University of Sydney and colleagues identified BAT employees on Facebook; they then searched the site for the name 'British American Tobacco' and company brands like 'Dunhill' and 'Lucky Strike.' Each term resulted in more than 500 search results on Facebook.

The researchers found, for example, that a Facebook group called Lucky Strike Fun was administered by a BAT employee from Greece. Large numbers of BAT employees also were members of groups promoting Lucky Strike and Dunhill, the study said.

"It is not possible to determine who created the Facebook pages that promoted the Dunhill and Lucky Strike brands," Freeman and colleagues noted. "However, according to Facebook's own rules of conduct these pages should have been created by persons authorized by BAT. It is also possible that these pages were created by private fans of BAT brands. However, given that BAT employees have joined these pages as BAT network members, the company cannot claim to be unaware of these promotional activities."

"Further, the goal of online social networking is to intentionally create communities where fans of a brand can promote the products they like through 'word of mouse' marketing and engage with the companies making these products," according to the study. "Given that pages/groups with bigger numbers of members generate more interest, the high number of BAT employees on the Lucky Strike fan page and the Kent cigarettes group could have been a strategy to help drive traffic to the page/group. Even if BAT did not create these pages itself, it has not removed this content from Facebook."

<http://www.jointogether.org/news/research/summaries/2010/tobacco-co-employee-fans.html>

## 1 in 5 College Students Admitted to Drunk Driving



Drinking and driving among college students is still a major public health problem with one in five admitting to driving while drunk and 40 percent acknowledging they have ridden with a drunk driver. Equally worrisome, their tendency to drive under the influence soars when they hit the minimum legal drinking age of 21.

The findings were gleaned from a study that followed more than 1,250 first-year college students for four years while enrolled at a large mid-Atlantic university. "Drinking and driving endangers the safety of not only the drinking driver and passengers, but also other individuals on the road," said one of the study's authors. "College students have limited driving experience, making drinking and driving possibly even more hazardous. [While] other studies have examined drinking and driving among college students, to our knowledge this is the first to have examined how the behavior changes over time in the same sample of students."

[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_99502.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_99502.html)



## U.S. Cigarettes Higher in Chemicals?

**A**mericans inhale more cancer-causing agents with their cigarettes, probably because of the tobacco blend, while smokers in Canada, Britain and Australia get less, U.S. researchers recently reported. The study also demonstrated that the amounts of these carcinogens in a smoker's cigarette butts directly correlated with tell-tale compounds in the smoker's urine.

"We know that cigarettes from around the world vary in their ingredients and the way they are produced," said Dr. Jim Pirkle of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who heads a lab using a mass spectrometer to measure levels of chemicals in people's bodies. "All of these cigarettes contain harmful levels of carcinogens, but these findings show that amounts of tobacco-specific nitrosamines differ from country to country, and U.S. brands are the highest in the study," Pirkle said.

"Seventeen eligible cigarette brands (between 3 and 5 brands from each country) were selected on the basis of national sales and nicotine yield to identify popular brands with a range of ventilation," the researchers wrote. Ventilation is how much air is mixed in with the smoke from the cigarette as it is inhaled. Participants had their saliva and urine tested and also turned over their used cigarette butts to the researchers.

Tests were performed to determine the presence of nicotine and for the chemicals 4-(methylnitrosamino)-1-(3-pyridyl)-1-butanone (NNK for short) and the breakdown product of NNK in the body, called NNAL. These cancer-causing agents are known as tobacco-specific nitrosamines or TSNAs.

"We have shown a direct association between the 24-hour mouth-level exposure of NNK resulting from cigarette smoking and the concentration of its primary metabolite, NNAL, in the urine of smokers," the researchers wrote. "Internal dose concentrations of urinary NNAL are significantly lower in smokers in countries that have lower TSNA levels in cigarettes such as Canada and Australia in contrast to countries that have high levels of these carcinogens in cigarettes, such as the United States."

The popular U.S. cigarette brands studied contained "American blend" tobacco, known to contain higher TSNA levels than the "bright" tobacco used in the most popular Australian, Canadian, and British brands. Australian and Canadian smokers got more nicotine than U.S. and British smokers, but not of TSNAs.

The World Health Organizations says 5 million people die every year from tobacco-related heart attacks, strokes and cancers. Another 430,000 adults die annually from breathing second-hand smoke.

Some of the brands tested included:

- \* Marlboro, sold by Philip Morris International and Altria Group Inc's Philip Morris USA unit.
- \* Winfield, manufactured under license by British American Tobacco Australia.
- \* Silk Cut and Benson & Hedges, produced by Japan Tobacco Inc.
- \* Players, made by Canada's largest manufacturer, Imperial Tobacco, a division of Imasco Ltd.
- \* Camels, made by Reynolds American.
- \* Newports, made by Lorillard Inc.

# Valley Youth House

Address: 531 Main Street  
Bethlehem, Pa 18018

Phone: 610.954.9561

Fax: 610.954.5944

E-Mail: [vyhmain@valleyyouthhouse.org](mailto:vyhmain@valleyyouthhouse.org)



**Know someone else who might be interested  
in The Digest?**

If you know anyone else who might be interested in receiving The Digest from Valley Youth House, include their name and e-mail address below, and return to Valley Youth House. The e-mail address will not be shared with anyone.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

***We're on the Web!***

***See us at:***

***[www.valleyyouthhouse.org](http://www.valleyyouthhouse.org)***