

## Smokers' Attitudes Toward Potential "Reduced-Exposure" Tobacco Products (PREPs)

The tobacco industry has in recent years introduced a proliferation of potential reduced-exposure tobacco products (PREPs), marketing such products as alternatives to conventional cigarettes and sometimes claiming they are less harmful or less addictive. PREPs include modified tobacco cigarettes, cigarette-like products, and oral/smokeless tobacco products. Public health experts have raised concern about the marketing of PREPs, noting that these products pose substantial challenges for tobacco control efforts because smokers may perceive the products as an alternative to quitting or as a "less harmful" alternative to conventional cigarettes.

Many studies have documented public misperceptions about "light" cigarettes and have demonstrated that smokers may switch to these brands expecting a health benefit. Research on PREPs follows a similar pattern, documenting that smokers are interested in trying PREPs and perceive them to have lower health risks, even when advertising does not make explicit health claims. Combined data from HINTS 2003 and 2005 show that 54% of current smokers report that they would be "very" or "somewhat" interested in trying a cigarette advertised as less harmful.

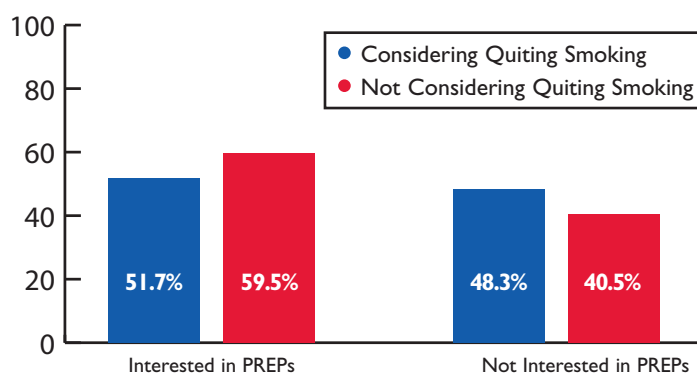
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was recently granted authority to regulate tobacco, including the authority to develop regulations governing claims for "modified risk" products. The 2009 legislation also banned use of the terms "light," "low," and "mild" in cigarette labeling and advertising.

In this HINTS Brief, we explore smokers' attitudes toward PREPs and suggest opportunities for public education.

## Quick Facts

- Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, causing one in five deaths each year from cancer, cardiovascular and pulmonary disease, and other causes.
- Chewing tobacco and snuff contain 28 carcinogens and cause oral and pancreatic cancers.
- Epidemiologic and other scientific data demonstrate that changes in cigarette design since the 1950s, including the introduction of "light" cigarettes, have not decreased the risks of smoking.
- There is insufficient evidence that new "reduced-exposure" tobacco products provide benefits to smokers' health.

## Interest in PREPs and Consideration of Quitting Smoking



Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) 2003, 2005

## Study Finds Smokers Interested in PREPs Despite Lack of Health Benefit

*Heavy smokers and "health conscious" smokers vulnerable to misleading claims*

In a 2009 research study using data from HINTS 2003 and 2005, investigators found that there is substantial awareness of PREPs among U.S. adults, although use of these products remains relatively low. Furthermore, results from this study suggest that there is a substantial level of interest among current smokers in cigarettes marketed with claims of reduced exposure or harm.

Of particular concern is that heavy smokers (those who smoke 20 or more cigarettes per day) who are not planning to quit, and smokers who categorize themselves as "health conscious," may be especially receptive to PREPs marketing strategies and may view PREPs as an alternative to quitting smoking. One-half of HINTS respondents who had tried a PREP reported doing so to reduce harm or assist in quitting.

# Adult Smokers' Interest in PREPs: Differences by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Smoking Behavior

Although use of PREPs remains low in the United States, there is substantial interest among smokers in products that purport to be less hazardous to health. Interest in PREPs differs by gender, race/ethnicity, and smoking behavior.

## Gender

Female smokers (59%) are more likely to be interested in PREPs than male smokers (50%).

## Race/Ethnicity

A higher proportion of non-Hispanic whites (57%) report interest in PREPs than Hispanics (46%) and African Americans (40%). Those classified as "other race" (e.g., Native Americans, Asians, and those not reporting a race/ethnicity) show an overall higher level of interest in PREPs (63%).

## Smoking Behavior

Daily smokers (58%) are substantially more likely to be interested in PREPs than those who smoke only on some days (41.6%). Moreover, smokers who are not currently considering quitting (59.5%) show more interest in PREPs than smokers who want to quit (51.7%).

## How Can This Inform Your Work?

HINTS data show that there is substantial interest in PREPs among smokers and that the majority of those who have tried PREPs have done so to reduce harm or assist in their efforts to quit. Health communication practitioners can strive to reverse this trend by:

- Spreading the word that PREPs are not a good alternative to quitting smoking or chewing tobacco, nor are they a "safer" alternative to these behaviors
- Educating tobacco users that quitting tobacco completely is the only proven way to reduce the risk of tobacco-related illness and disease
- Raising awareness about FDA-approved medicines to help tobacco users quit (nicotine gum, inhalers, lozenges, nasal sprays, and patches; bupropion SR pills, varenicline pills)
- Encouraging smokers to visit <http://smokefree.gov> for help with quitting

**About HINTS**  
<http://hints.cancer.gov>

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) fielded the first Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) in 2002 and 2003, surveying 6,369 Americans. Subsequent surveys followed in 2005 (5,586 Americans surveyed) and 2008 (7,674 Americans surveyed). HINTS was created to monitor changes in the rapidly evolving field of health communication. The survey data can be used to understand how adults 18 years and older use different communication channels to obtain health information for themselves and their loved ones, and to create more effective health communication strategies across populations.

HINTS *Briefs* provide a snapshot of noteworthy research findings. They introduce population-level estimates for specific questions in the survey and summarize significant research findings that are a result of analyzing how certain demographic characteristics influence specific outcomes. Many *Briefs* summarize research findings from recent peer-reviewed journal articles using HINTS data.

## For More Information on Cancer

- Call the NCI Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER
- Visit <http://cancer.gov>
- Order NCI publications at <https://cissecure.nci.nih.gov/ncipubs/>

## References Used in This HINTS Brief

Parascandola M, Augustson E, O'Connell ME, Marcus S. Consumer awareness and attitudes related to new potential reduced-exposure tobacco product brands. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*. July 2009. 11(7):886-895.

