



# Rhode Island Public Health Brief Youth Tobacco Use in Rhode Island

Although smoking among teens has dropped considerably since the 1990s, each day over 2,500 adolescents in the U.S. will smoke their first cigarette and nearly 600 will become daily smokers.<sup>i</sup> Over one quarter of high school students report use of at least one tobacco product.<sup>ii</sup> The more than 200,000 new adolescent smokers each year, affirms the need to continue anti-smoking and anti-tobacco interventions aimed at our youth. Key to this continued focus is better understanding the evolution of the tobacco industry’s products and advertising strategies targeting youth markets.

## New Tobacco Products Create New Challenges

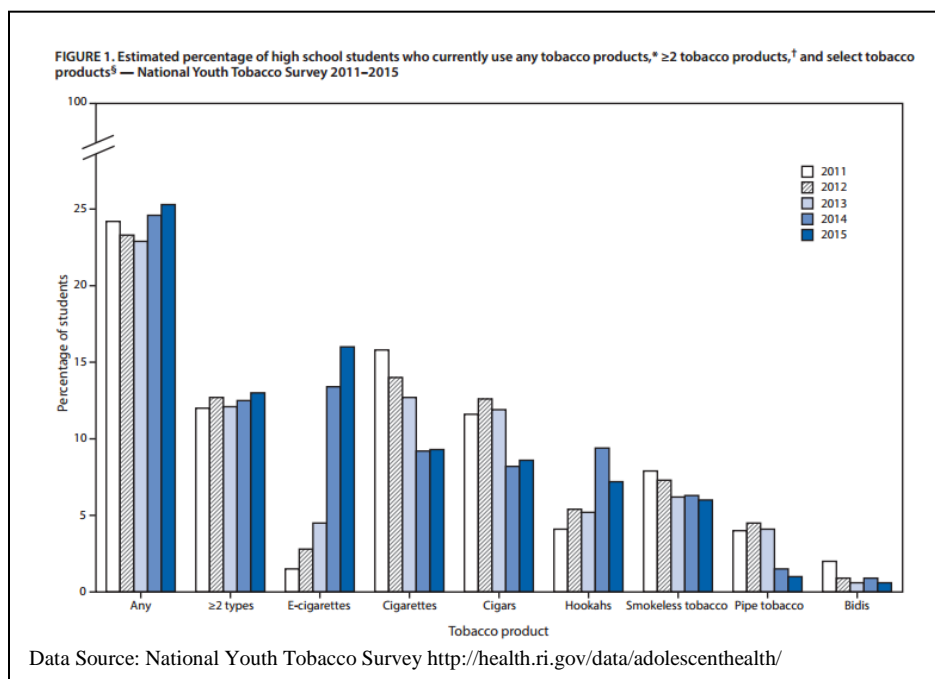
As anti-smoking policies and campaigns have taken effect, the tobacco industry has created new products for the market. More than \$8.4 billion dollars were spent in 2011 on development, marketing and promotion of tobacco and nicotine. Efforts to attract and create new addicted users, specifically in the youth market, are propelled by new products specifically geared toward young people. Fruit- flavored single cigars wrapped in colorful and sweet smelling packaging are available for as little as \$.99 and smokeless products such as mint flavored “snus” (small teabag-like pouches placed between the cheek and gum) are inexpensive and can be used without notice. Dissolvable tobacco products are designed to maintain an addiction to nicotine. Tobacco companies directly portray these tobacco products as a “healthier” alternative to cigarettes.<sup>iii</sup> Research shows that 11.7% of high school students believe smokeless tobacco products are safer than cigarettes.<sup>iv</sup>

**Product Use:** Among high school students nation-wide, it is clear that use of traditional cigarettes are down. However, the use of E-Cigarettes has increased markedly in recent years. Overall, with the availability of E-Cigarettes use of tobacco products among youth are going up.<sup>4</sup>

## Rhode Island Youth

Though national reports of teen smoking have indicated decreases (Figure 1), youth are still at risk in Rhode Island. In Rhode Island, the most commonly used forms of tobacco, were e-cigarettes (19.3%), Hookah (11.8%), cigars (including little cigars or cigarillos)(8.4%), smokeless tobacco (5.3%).<sup>ii</sup>

Unfortunately, the earlier in life a youth starts using tobacco the more likely he or she will be addicted to nicotine, which prolongs tobacco use. The good news is that if smokers do not begin before the age of 19, they most likely never will. Delay of smoking or prevention of youth smoking can help reduce the percentage of people with smoking-related health problems in the future.



## What Youth Populations are at the Greatest Risk?

Tobacco use is not uniform among Rhode Islanders. Higher risk for tobacco use is found among African American youth; Hispanic/Latino youth; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and youth who are unsure of their sexual identity (LGBU); and youth with physical or emotional disabilities.



Camel Orbs Fresh is a tablet-type tobacco product... often mistaken for mints or other candies by youth.

Photo by Andrew Seidenberg, courtesy Harvard School of Public Health, as printed in the American Public Health Association newsletter, *The Nation's Health*, August 2010; 40(6):1-14.

## Interventions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified reducing tobacco use as a winnable battle.<sup>v</sup> The CDC's best practice interventions aim to prevent youth initiation of tobacco use. Despite the fact that 700 children become daily smokers each year in Rhode Island, the state has the third-lowest youth smoking rate in the country. Best practice interventions include:

- Keeping the price of cigarettes high given that the higher tobacco prices have the greatest impact on youth
- Educating community members and decision makers on importance of tax parity for cheaper tobacco products such as little cigars and cigarillos
- Educating communities about the direct relation of retail advertising and teen smoking rates<sup>vi</sup>
- Motivating youth to resist becoming replacement smokers for those adult smokers who are dying of tobacco related illness

Despite the enormity of the challenge posed by the tobacco industry, Rhode Island has been successful and is nationally recognized for its accomplishments in implementing a high-quality, comprehensive, statewide tobacco control program. However, much work remains to be done to continue to protect our youth from the dangers of these deadly products.

<sup>i</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), HHS, Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH: Summary of National Findings, 2014

<sup>ii</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2015 Rhode Island High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey weighted data file.

<sup>iii</sup> Krisberg K. New types of smokeless tobacco present growing risks for youth: Survey: Products mistaken for candy. *The Nation's Health*. August 2010; 40(6):1-14

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. High School Risk Behavior Surveillance System online. Accessed at: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx?SID=HS>

<sup>v</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Winnable Battles: Tobacco Use. Accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/WinnableBattles/Tobacco/index.html>

<sup>vi</sup> Henriksen L., Feighery EC, Wang Y, et al. Association of retail tobacco marketing with adolescent smoking. *Am J Public Health*, 2004;94(12):2081-3