

Evidence: Young People and Smoking

Purpose

A review of research evidence was undertaken to support the development of the NCSCT briefing on *Young people and stopping smoking*, which was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). See this briefing and other resources relating to young people and stopping smoking here:

<https://www.ncsct.co.uk/publications/category/young-people-smoking>

A search and review of the research evidence was conducted to cover the:

- patterns and prevalence of smoking in young people
- reasons associated with young people starting smoking
- interventions to support young people to stop smoking

For the evidence reviews, and briefings, young people were defined as those under the age of 18. However, research in this area sometimes only focuses on 12–15-year-olds or those up to 25 years old. We have acknowledged within the documentation where we have drawn on evidence from a different age range to that defined.

Search Strategies

We undertook a review using:

- published systematic reviews
- additional database searches
- trial registries
- grey literature (reports, monographs, book chapters)

Published Systematic reviews

Using MEDLINE, Embase, and PsychINFO and search terms guided by [The Cochrane TAG Specialised Register | Cochrane Tobacco Addiction](#)

Inclusion criteria:

- young persons (defined as under 18 years of age)
- we primarily focused on UK studies only. Where the evidence base was limited or non-existent, we then included international studies with a focus on Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA.

Additional Database searches

We searched the included studies list from the latest Cochrane review (2017) on *Tobacco cessation interventions for young people* to identify relevant studies published up to June 2017.

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD003289.pub6/full>

The Cochrane review includes the subset of published studies that are RCTs and report on smoking abstinence at six months or longer. We complimented this by examining non-RCT (randomised controlled trial) studies which may report on cessation at less than six months. We searched the excluded studies list from the Cochrane review to identify studies that were excluded due to the following:

1. Non-RCT design
2. Outcome measure was abstinence reported at less than 6-months follow-up
3. Reported on outcomes other than cessation

We updated the search to capture any more recent RCT evidence, non-randomized RCTs, and observational studies, and evaluations between February 2017 and February 2025. We searched MEDLINE, Embase, and PsychINFO using the search terms used by [The Cochrane TAG Specialised Register | Cochrane Tobacco Addiction](#). We focused initially on searching for UK based research and expanded to broader international experience where there were a limited number of publications.

Trial registries

We searched the UK's Clinical Study registry (ISRCTN; <https://www.isrctn.com/>) and the NIH Clinical Trials registry (<https://clinicaltrials.gov/>) for any unpublished trial data, current trials in progress or registered new trials, involving smoking cessation interventions for young people up until February 2025. We focused on young people under the age of 18, however included trials where they had included a higher upper age if they included under 18s.

Grey literature search strategy

We searched the worldwide web and government websites to identify published reports, books/book chapters, or monographs reporting on evidence, best practice, or evaluations or insight work (quantitative and qualitative) which have addressed either preventing or stopping smoking among young persons. This search was limited to reports published by reputable universities and governments or the equivalent (e.g. not for profit organisations). We focused the search on young people under the age of 18

and expanded to 18-24 years where there was a sparsity of reports and thoughts that key insights would be lost.

The following key words were used to conduct searches:

Youth, or children or young people, or adolescents, school aged
and
Smoking or tobacco
and
Preventing or addressing or uptake
or
Stopping or cessation or quitting

The following organisational websites were also searched using same key words:

- Google
- NICE (UK)
- English Department of Health
- Wales Department of Health
- Scottish Department of Health
- Republic of Ireland
- Australian Department of Health
- New Zealand Department of Health
- CDC (USA)
- World Health Organisation
- Health Canada
- CADTH (Canadian Agency for Drug and Technologies in Health)
- European Network for Smoking Prevention
- European Commission