

SOURCE: The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University



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At Columbia University

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New CASA* Report: Teen Cigarette Smoking Linked to Brain Damage, Alcohol and Illegal Drug Abuse, Mental Illness

Teen Cigarette Smokers Likelier to Meet Medical Criteria for Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Dependence

NEW YORK, NY--(Marketwire - October 23, 2007) - The nicotine in tobacco products poses a significant danger of structural and chemical changes in developing brains that can make teens more vulnerable to alcohol and other drug addiction and to mental illness, according to Tobacco: The Smoking Gun, a new white paper released today by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University and commissioned by The Citizens' Commission to Protect the Truth, a group of all former U.S. Secretaries of Health, Education, and Welfare and of Health and Human Services, all former U.S. Surgeons General, and all former Directors of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Commission asked CASA to assemble the scientific evidence of the impact of nicotine on the adolescent brain, conduct original analyses of data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) on the relationship between teen smoking, alcohol and illegal drug abuse and addiction and mental health, and issue a report on its findings. **CASA's original analysis of data from the NSDUH finds that teens who smoke are nine times likelier to meet the medical criteria for past year alcohol abuse or dependence and 13 times likelier to meet the medical criteria for abuse and dependence on an illegal drug than teens who don't smoke.**

"These findings sound an alarm for parents, teachers, pediatricians and others responsible for children's health that smoking by teens may well signal the fire of alcohol and other drug abuse and mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorders," said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., chairman and president of CASA and speaking on behalf of The Citizens' Commission as its chairman. "We have known for a long time that smoking causes deadly and crippling cancers and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Now we see the devastating effects that nicotine can have on the developing brains of our children and teens."

Smoking and Alcohol and Illegal Drug Use

Compared to 12- to 17-year-olds who don't smoke, those who do are more than five times likelier to drink and 13 times likelier to use marijuana than nonsmokers.

Compared to those who never smoked, those who began smoking at age 12 or younger are:

- More than three times likelier to binge drink;
- Nearly 15 times likelier to smoke marijuana; and
- Nearly seven times likelier to use other illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

Smoking and Mental Health Disorders

The CASA analysis also found that among teens ages 12 to 17, twice as many smokers as nonsmokers suffered from symptoms of depression in the past year. Teens who reported early initiation of smoking were more likely to experience serious feelings of hopelessness, depression and worthlessness in the past year.

The report also notes that smoking at a young age is related to panic attacks, general anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"We have long known that nicotine is extraordinarily addictive and that youth can become addicted extremely quickly," said Cheryl G. Healton, Dr.P.H., president and CEO of the American Legacy Foundation. "This new report underscores what we know about the developing brains of teens who are highly vulnerable to personal, social and media influences to begin smoking and why it is so vital to reach them with information about tobacco before they start to smoke. Because 80 percent of smokers begin before age 18, when their young brains and bodies are so susceptible to the effects of nicotine, it is imperative that we stop what for so many will result in lost years and lives to tobacco addiction, disease and death."

Based on the findings of the white paper, CASA and the Commission recommend:

- Sharply restricting all tobacco advertising, marketing and promotion.
- Stepping up evidence-based prevention and cessation efforts, including counter-advertising programs.
- Giving the FDA comprehensive authority to regulate tobacco.
- Mandating evidence-based tobacco cessation in substance abuse treatment and mental health care settings.
- Enforcing laws restricting sale of tobacco to minors and enacting indoor and outdoor clean air laws to limit children's exposure to second-hand smoke.

"The public health case against tobacco for hiking the chances of damaging our children's developing brains in ways that can increase their risk of alcohol and other drug abuse and mental illness is clear," noted Califano, who started the national anti-smoking campaign in 1978. "The time has come to curb cigarette advertisements and promotions by the nicotine pushers and step up campaigns like the American Legacy Foundation's truth® effort to protect our nation's children."

The Citizens' Commission to Protect the Truth, a group of all former U.S. Secretaries of Health, Education, and Welfare and of Health and Human Services, all former U.S. Surgeons General, and all former Directors of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Republican and Democrat from every Administration over the last forty years, was formed in March 2004 to prevent youth from smoking. Among its efforts, the Commission shines a spotlight on the continued need to fund truth®, the only independent national youth counter-marketing campaign with demonstrated results in keeping children and teens from smoking. For more information on the Commission, visit its Web site at www.ProtectTheTruth.org.

CASA is the only national organization that brings together under one roof all the professional disciplines needed to study and combat all types of substance abuse as they affect all aspects of society. CASA has issued 66 reports and white papers, published one book, conducted demonstration projects focused on children, families and schools at 204 sites in 76 cities and counties in 30 states plus Washington, DC and two Native American tribal reservations, and has been evaluating the effectiveness of drug and alcohol treatment in a variety of programs and drug courts. CASA is the creator of the nationwide initiative Family Day -- A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™ -- the fourth Monday in September -- the 22nd in 2008 -- that promotes parental engagement as a simple and effective way to reduce children's risk of smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs. In May of 2007, CASA Chairman Joseph A. Califano, Jr. called for a fundamental shift in the nation's attitude about substance abuse and addiction with the publication of his book, "HIGH SOCIETY: How Substance Abuse Ravages America and What to Do About It." For more information visit www.casacolumbia.org.

*The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University is neither affiliated with, nor sponsored by, the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (also known as "CASA") or any of its member organizations, or any other organizations with the name of "CASA."

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