

Research Briefing

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Statistics on smoking



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- 5 Costs of smoking

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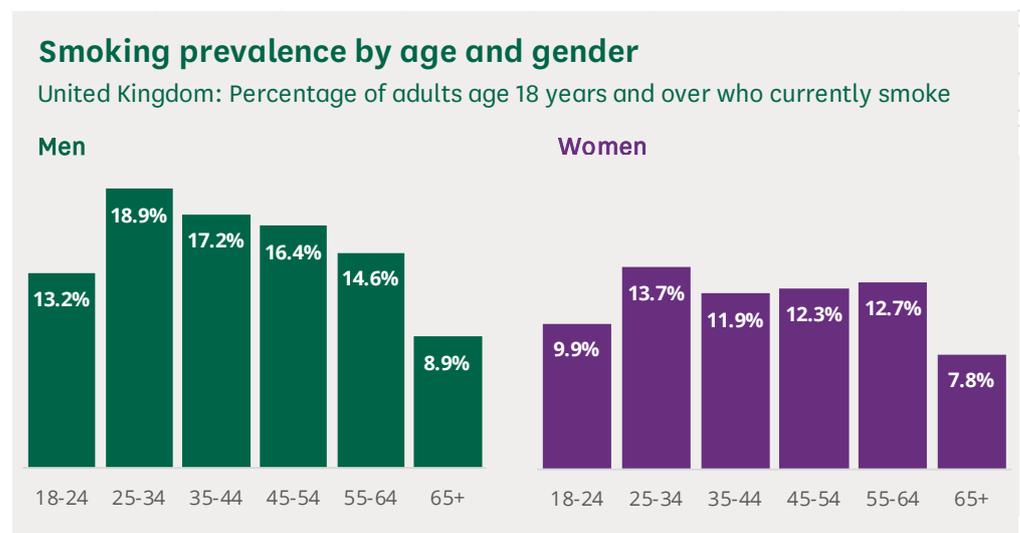
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Summary

In 2022, around 12.9% of people aged 18 years and over in the UK were current smokers, equating to around 6.4 million people.

Men were more likely to smoke than women in the UK, with 14.6% of men and 11.2% of women reporting that they were current smokers in 2022.

Smoking prevalence was highest among those aged 25 to 34 years, and lowest among those aged 65 year and over.



Source: ONS [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries, Table 1](#)

E cigarettes

Figures for 2022 also show that around 8.7% of those aged 16 and over in Great Britain were daily or occasional users of e-cigarettes.

In 2021, less than 1% of 11-15 year olds reported regular smoking. However, there was an increase in the number of children and young people reporting use of e-cigarettes, rising from 6% in 2014 to 15% in 2021.

Health impacts

Smoking is a leading cause of preventable illness and death. There were 506,100 hospital admissions due to smoking in 2019/20, and in 2019 there were 74,800 deaths attributed to smoking among adults aged 35 and over.

1 Smoking among adults

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) collects data on adults' smoking habits using two surveys:

- The [Annual Population Survey \(APS\)](#) provides headline indicators of the number of adults aged 18 years and over who smoke in the UK. The sample size associated with the APS enables local level estimates of smoking to be compiled.
- The [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey \(OPN\)](#) also collects information on smoking habits, intention to quit smoking and e-cigarette users aged 16 years and over in Great Britain. The OPN data, combined with previous ONS surveys, affords a time series of smoking prevalence estimates back to 1974.

1.1 Annual Population Survey (APS) estimates

All figures in Section 1.1 are sourced from the ONS dataset on [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries](#)

In 2022, around 12.9% of people aged 18 years and over in the UK were current smokers. This is the lowest reported figure since the APS data collection started in 2011, when an estimated 20.2% of adults smoked.

The 2022 smoking prevalence rate of 12.9% equates to around 6.4 million smokers in the UK.

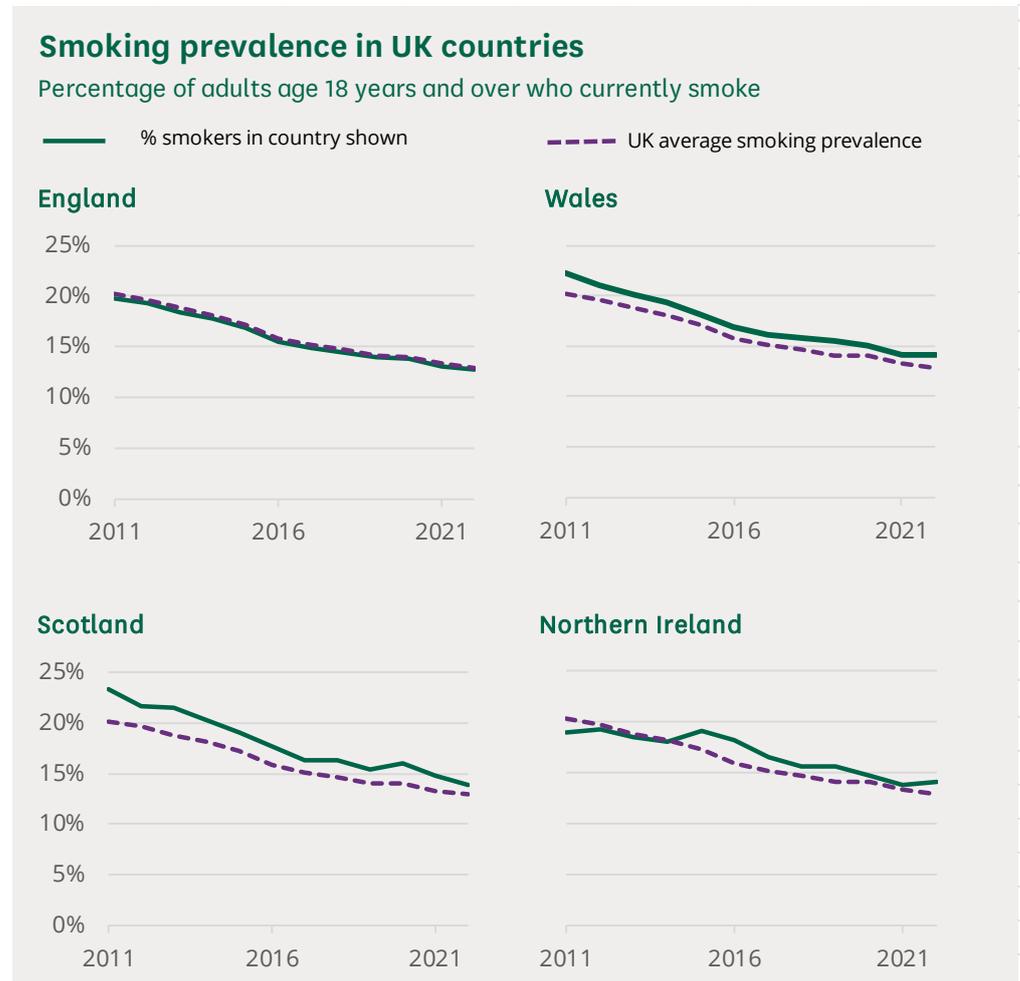
Since 2011, smoking rates have fallen in all countries of the UK. The largest decline was observed in Scotland where rates fell from 23.4% in 2011 to 13.9% in 2022. The Scotland rate remains above the UK average but is now closer to that average than in any other year.

The smallest change was observed in Northern Ireland where rates fell by around five percentage points between 2011 and 2022, from 18.9% to 14.0%.

Rates in England fell from 19.8% in 2011 to 12.7% in 2022 and in Wales they fell from 22.3% to 14.1% over the same period.

England had the lowest proportion of current smokers in 2022 (12.7%). APS data is the official measure used to monitor and track progress against the [Tobacco Control Plan for England](#). Published in 2017, the plan aimed to reduce smoking prevalence among adults in England to 12% or less by the end of 2022. This target has not been met.

In 2019, the government published its green paper on preventative health; [Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s](#).¹ Here, it announced an ambition for England to become ‘smoke-free’ by 2030, achieved when adult smoking prevalence falls to 5% or less. This target will continue to be monitored using APS data.



Source: ONS [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries, Table 1](#)

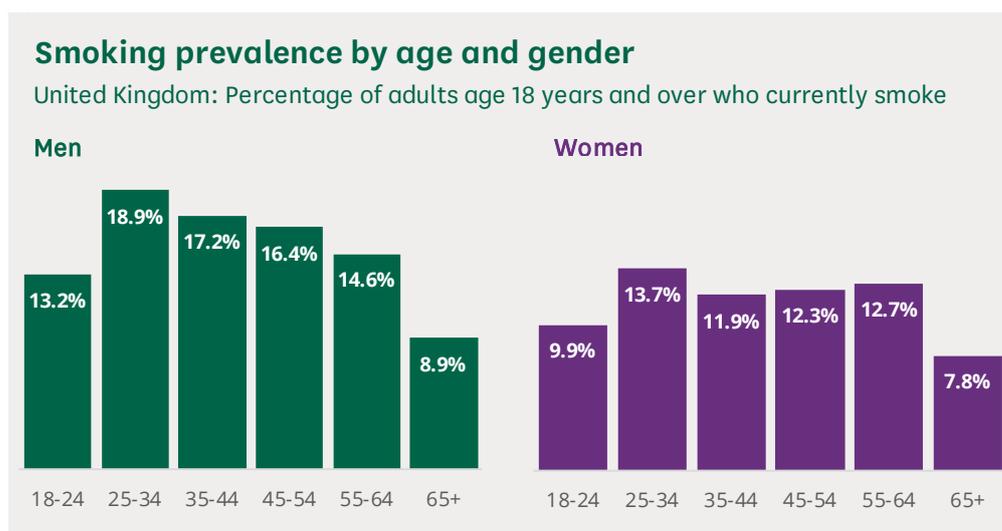
Characteristics of smokers

Men are more likely to smoke than women in the UK, with 14.6% of men and 11.2% of women reporting that they were current smokers in 2022.

Smoking prevalence was highest among those aged 25 to 34 years, with 18.9% of men and 13.7% of women in this age group reporting smoking.

The lowest rates of smoking were among those aged 65 year and over: 8.9% of men and 7.8% women currently smoked.

¹ Cabinet Office and Department of Health and Social Care, [Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s- consultation document](#), 22 July 2019



Source: ONS [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries, Table 1](#)

Smoking is also known to be associated with characteristics such as housing tenure, educational level, relationship status and socio-economic status (as shown in the chart overleaf).

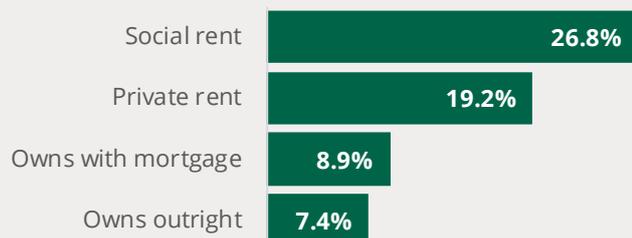
In 2022 smoking was more prevalent among:

- Social renters (26.8%) compared with other tenure groups, particularly mortgage holders (8.9%) and those who owned their property outright (7.4%).
- People in a "routine and manual" socio-economic group² (22.8%) compared with "managerial and professional occupations" (8.3%).
- Those who has no educational qualifications (27.2%) compared with people with a degree or equivalent (6.5%)
- Cohabiting (17.7%) or single (17.5%) persons compared with those who were married or in a civil partnership (8.5%).

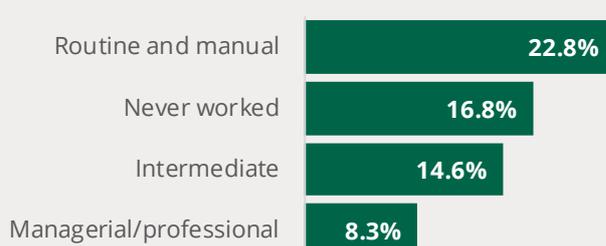
² According to the [National Statistics Socio-economic Classification \(NS-SEC\)](#)

Characteristics of current cigarette smokers in the UK: 2022

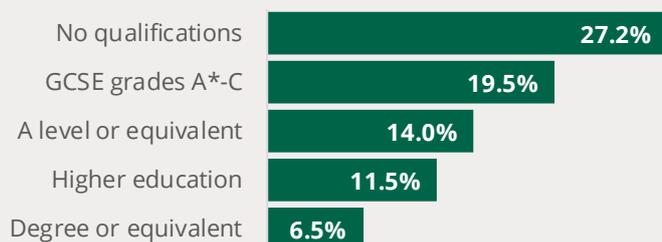
Housing tenure



Socio-economic status



Educational achievement



Marital status



Source: ONS [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries, Tables 7.8, 9 and 13](#)

Local level data

The sample size of the APS allows sub-national estimates of smoking prevalence to be compiled.

In 2022, smoking prevalence was highest in the East Midlands (14.0%) and lowest in the South East (11.5%).

Smoking prevalence declined in all English regions between 2011 and 2022 but the rate of change was more pronounced in some areas. Prevalence fell by 8.8 percentage points in the Yorkshire & the Humber region and by 8.5 percentage points in the North West.

These two regions had the highest proportion of smokers in 2011 (21.9%) but by 2022 Yorkshire & the Humber had moved down to the joint fifth highest rate among regions while the North West was the joint second highest.

A relatively smaller reduction in prevalence in the East Midlands, a 6.8 percentage point fall, saw the region move from the fourth highest rate in 2011 to the highest in 2022.

Smoking prevalence by region of England					
Percentage of adults age 18 years and over who currently smoke					
	2011		2022		Percentage point change
	%	Rank	%	Rank	
East Midlands	20.2%	4	14.0%	1	-6.2%
North West	21.9%	1	13.4%	2	-8.5%
West Midlands	19.2%	6	13.4%	2	-5.8%
East of England	19.3%	5	13.2%	4	-6.1%
Yorkshire & the Humber	21.9%	1	13.1%	5	-8.8%
North East	21.3%	3	13.1%	5	-8.2%
South West	18.8%	8	11.9%	7	-6.9%
London	19.2%	6	11.7%	8	-7.5%
South East	18.2%	9	11.5%	9	-6.7%

Source: ONS [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries, Table 2](#)

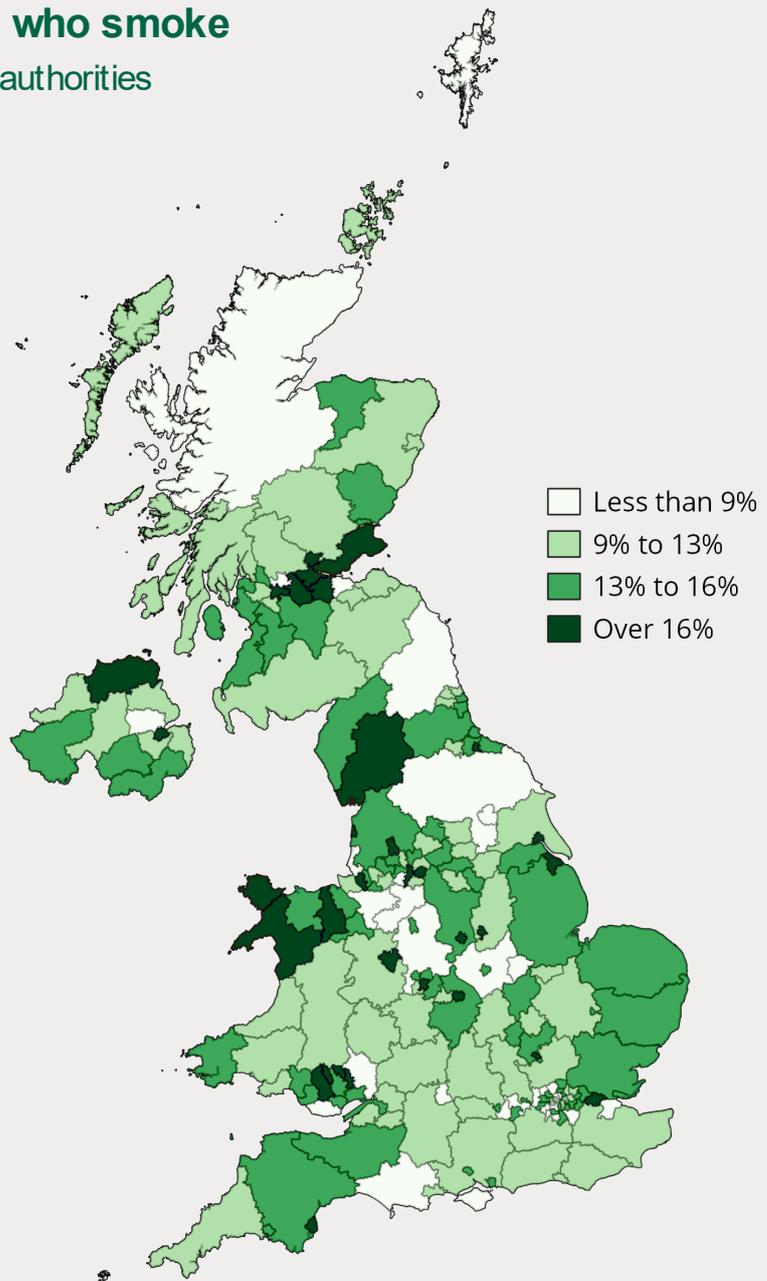
Smoking prevalence also shows variation at local authority level as shown in the map overleaf.

Percentage of UK adults who smoke

People aged 18 or over in local authorities

Areas with rates over 20%

Mid Devon	25.1%
Hastings	23.7%
Lincoln	23.5%
Boston	22.9%
North East Lincolnshire	21.8%
Mansfield	21.4%
Crawley	21.4%
Nottingham	21.2%
Luton	21.1%
Barrow-in-Furness	21.0%
Sandwell	21.0%
Lancaster	20.4%
Tameside	20.2%



Public Health England's [Tobacco Control Profiles](https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/tobacco-control)³ provide a range of detailed data on smoking prevalence and other smoking-related variables for local areas in England.

³ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/tobacco-control>

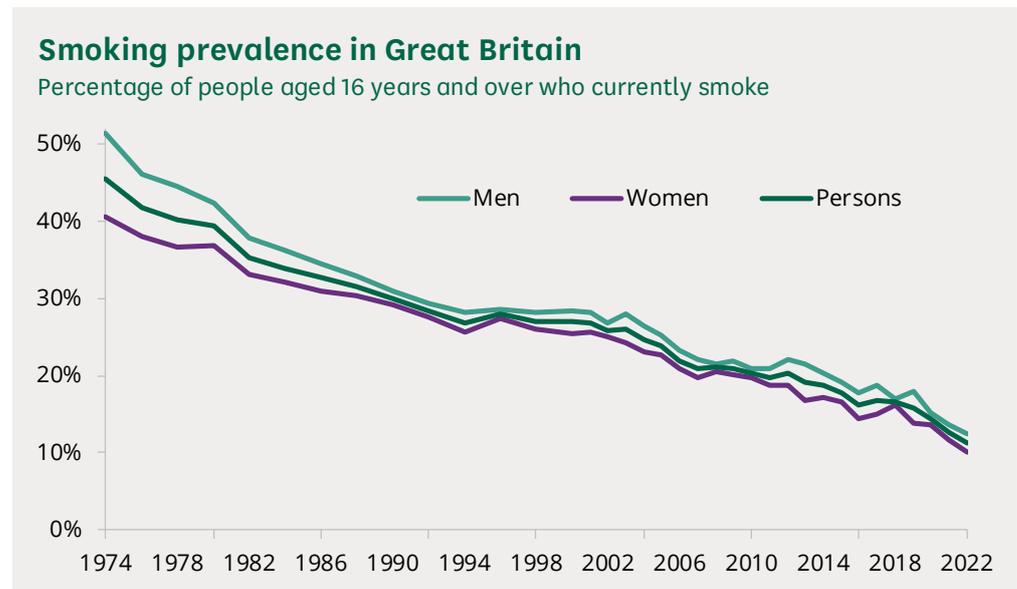
1.2

Opinions and Lifestyle Survey data

All figures in Section 1.2 are sourced from the ONS dataset on [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries](#)

The chart below shows details of smoking prevalence in Great Britain from 1974 to 2022. Smoking prevalence was 11.2% in 2022, the lowest level recorded. Prevalence was slightly higher among men (12.5%) compared with women (10.0%).

The gap between the male and female smoking rate has narrowed over the period shown. In 1974, the smoking rate for men (51.4%) was 10.7 percentage points higher than the rate among women (40.7%). In 2022 the gap was only 2.5 percentage points.



Source: ONS [Adult smoking habits in Great Britain, Table 1](#)

1.3

E-cigarettes

Figures in Section 1.3 are sourced from the ONS dataset on [E-cigarette use in Great Britain](#)

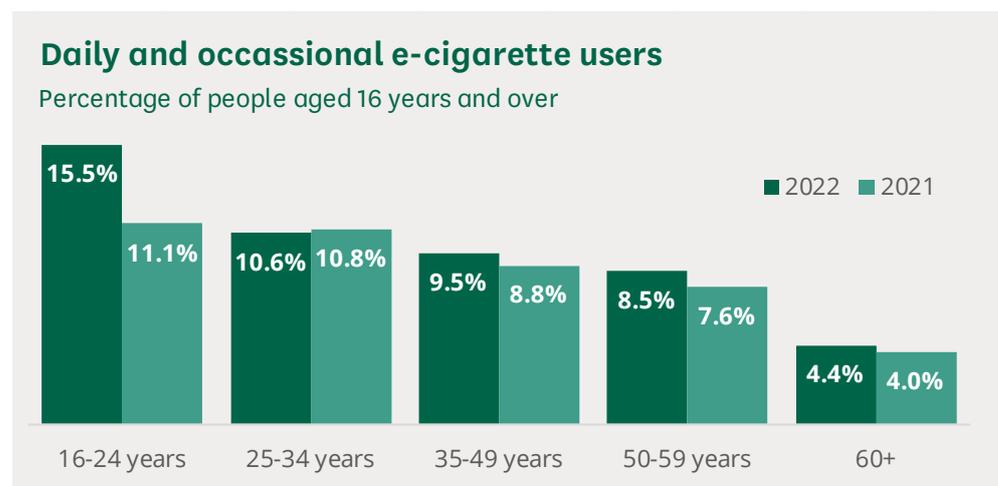
In 2022, around 5.2% of people aged 16 and over in Great Britain reported that they were currently daily users of an e-cigarette (daily vapers). A further 3.5% reported that they were occasional vapers.

The proportion of people reporting daily or occasional vaping was highest among current smokers (27.1%) and ex-smokers (16.5%) compared with those who have never smoked cigarettes (2.4%).

In 2022, 16-24 year olds were more likely to report daily or occasional vaping than all other age groups. There was a statistically significant⁴ increase in

⁴ Meaning we can be confident that there was a change in prevalence.

daily or occasional vaping compared with 2021 rates, rising from 11.1% in 2021 to 15.5% in 2022.



Source: ONS [E-cigarette use in Great Britain, Table 1](#)

The 2022 increase in e-cigarette usage among 16 to 24 year olds was attributable to changes in rates for young women. The percentage of women aged 16 to 24 years, reporting daily or occasional vaping increased from 9.0% in 2021 to 18.9% in 2022. Among men aged 16 to 24 years a small decrease was observed, from 13.0% down to 12.3%.

1.4

Smoking while pregnant

The 2017 tobacco control plan for England⁵ set a national ambition to reduce the number of women smoking at the time of delivery to less than 6% of all pregnancies by 2022.

NHS data for England on [Smoking Status at Time of Delivery](#)⁶ shows that in 2022/23, 8.8% of mothers were recorded as smokers at the time of delivery.

The 2022/23 rate is above the national ambition of 6%. However, it is worth noting that the percentage of women smoking at the time of delivery has fallen from the 15.1% observed when recording began in 2006/07.

Data for the first quarter of 2023/24 shows a slightly lower rate of 7.8% for England. It also shows that the 6% ambition is being met in the London NHS region where 4.0% of women were smokers at the time of delivery (see the table overleaf).

⁵ DHSC, [Smoke-free generation: tobacco control plan for England](#)

⁶ NHS Digital, [Statistics on Women's Smoking Status at Time of Delivery: England](#)

Smoking status at time of giving birth			
NHS regions of England: April to June 2023			
	Maternities	Current smokers	% smokers
London	25,321	1,017	4.0%
South East	20,335	1,446	7.1%
South West	11,736	947	8.1%
East of England	14,956	1,190	8.0%
North West	17,009	1,535	9.0%
Midlands	25,312	2,389	9.4%
North East and Yorkshire	17,779	1,748	9.8%
England	132,448	10,272	7.8%

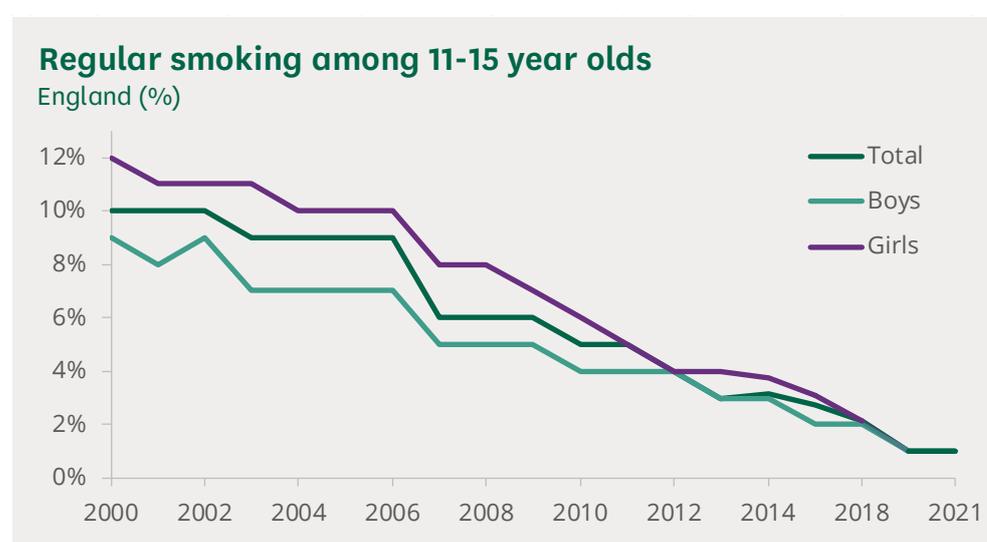
Source: NHS Digital, [Statistics on Women's Smoking Status at Time of Delivery: England, Table 3](#)

2

Smoking among young people

Figures in section 2 are sourced from the NHS Digital publication [Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England, 2021](#)

The Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England survey series provides data on smoking among school pupils aged 11–15 years in England. The prevalence of smoking shows a declining trend since the start of the century, and the latest data shows that in 2021 only around 1% of school pupils were classed as regular smokers (smoking at least once a week). Previously observed gender differences in smoking rates are no longer apparent.



Source: NHS Digital, [Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England, 2021](#)

Smoking prevalence increases significantly with age. In 2021, less than 1% of 11 year olds reported regular smoking compared with 7% of 15 year olds. Around a quarter (25%) of 15 year olds were either current or past smokers compared with 2% of 11 year olds.

There was a marked increase in the number of children and young people reporting use of e-cigarettes since 2014, when e-cigarette use was first included in the survey. Overall, the percentage reporting that they were current e-cigarette users increased from 4% in 2014 to 9% in 2021.

The change in e-cigarette use was largely attributable to rates for girls, which increased from 4% in 2014 to 10% in 2021. Over the same period, e-cigarette use among boys rose from 5% to 7%.

3

Deaths from smoking

Smoking is a major preventable cause of illness, disability and premature death in the United Kingdom.

The NHS Digital publication [Statistics on Smoking in England](#)⁷ reports an analysis of Office for National Statistics deaths data to estimate how many deaths were attributable to smoking. The latest estimates are that in 2019, 15% of all deaths in people aged 35 or over in England – 74,800 deaths – were attributable to smoking. 52% of cancer deaths and 47% of deaths due to respiratory diseases were attributable to smoking. In addition, in 2019, an estimated 13% (15,700) of deaths from circulatory diseases and 43% (800) of deaths from diseases of the digestive system were attributable to smoking.

There is an evident gender disparity in deaths from smoking with 20% of all male deaths estimated to be attributable to smoking, compared to 12% of female deaths.

Figures for [Smoking attributable deaths in Scotland](#)⁸ show that there were an estimated 8,260 smoking related deaths in 2021. This represents a declining trend since 2003 when 11,753 deaths in Scotland were attributed to smoking.

As in England, a larger proportion of deaths among men than women in Scotland were attributable to smoking, with an estimated 19% (4,789) of all deaths among men aged 35 and over being attributable to smoking in 2021. This compares with 14% (3,471) of all deaths among women.

⁷ NHS Digital [Statistics on Smoking, England 2020](#)

⁸ ScotPHO [Smoking attributable deaths in Scotland](#)

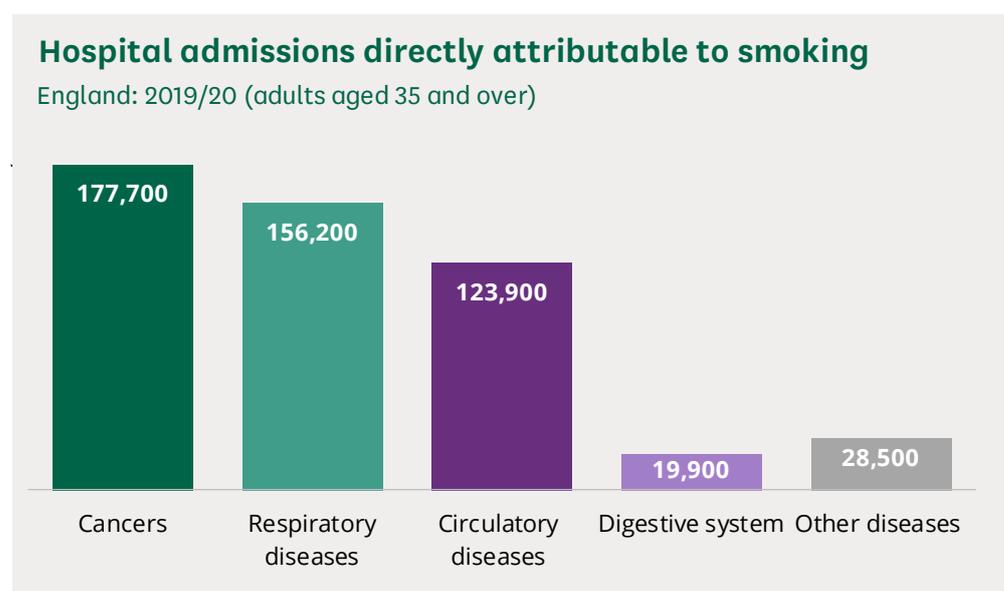
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Hospital admissions due to smoking

NHS hospital episode statistics for England, as reported in [Statistics on Smoking in England⁹](#), show that in 2019/20 there were around 2 million hospital admissions for adults aged 35 and over with a primary diagnosis of a disease that could potentially be caused by smoking.

However, not all these admissions will be directly attributable to smoking as there are other contributory factors to such diseases. To estimate the number of smoking-attributable hospital admissions, the NHS information centre used relative risks of these diseases for current and ex-smokers, compared to non-smokers, to calculate smoking-attributable hospital admissions.

It is estimated that around 506,100 hospital admissions in 2019/20 were directly attributable to smoking. Of these admissions, the majority (35%) were cancer related, 31% were respiratory diseases and 24% were circulatory diseases. Collectively these categories were responsible for over 90% of smoking attributable admissions.



Source: NHS Digital [Statistics on Smoking in England 2020: Data tables](#)

⁹ NHS Digital [Statistics on Smoking, England 2020](#)

5 Costs of smoking

Estimates of the cost of smoking span a wide range and are subject to debate. In addition, there is no clear consensus of the factors that should be included in calculating the cost of smoking.

Current estimates suggest that the overall cost of smoking to the UK economy may be up to £17 billion per year:

- Policy Exchange's 2010 report [Cough Up](#) gives an estimated cost of £14 billion to the UK economy.
- The Department of Health's 2017 [Tobacco Control Plan for England](#) estimated the overall cost of smoking as £11 billion per year.
- [Action on Smoking and Health](#) provide a 2021 based figure that smoking in England has an overall societal cost of £17 billion. This estimate included £2.4 billion in NHS costs and a further £1.2 billion in social care costs.

These estimates include costs to the NHS in healthcare expenditure treating smoking related conditions, lost productivity costs due to absenteeism, smoking breaks at work and premature mortality, as well as environmental costs.

The costs outlined above represent gross costs, but it should be acknowledged that the Treasury does receive tax income as a consequence of smoking.

HMRC estimates for 2022/23 show total tobacco tax receipts of £10 billion, of which £7.5 billion are cigarette receipts¹⁰.

¹⁰ HMRC [Tobacco statistics commentary July 2023](#)

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