

## HKU study provides first evidence that rise in tobacco tax curbs adolescent smoking



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## Curbing youth smoking is very important

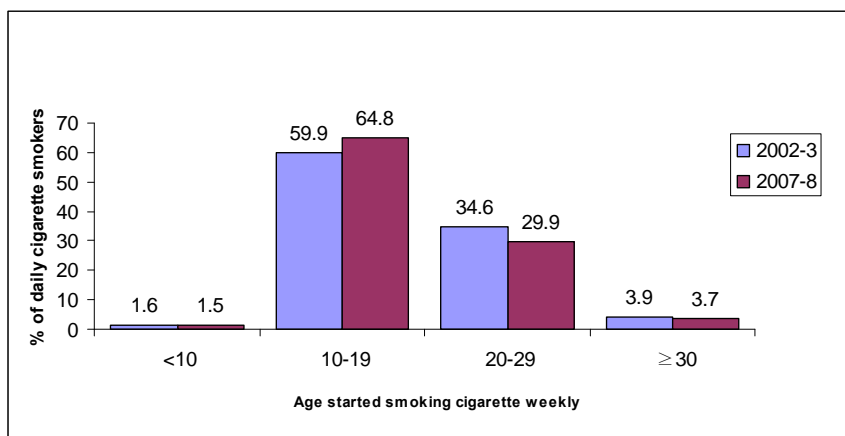
- Most adult smokers started smoking during adolescence (USSG, 1995)
- Tobacco industry is targeting youth (WHO, 2008)
- Risk of death even higher (Death risk rises from 1/2 to 2/3) if smoking started at young age (Doll, 2004)

1. US Surgeon General (USSG) Report. (1995). Youth and tobacco, preventing tobacco use among young people.
2. World Health Organisation (WHO) Report. (2008). Tobacco industry interference with tobacco control.
3. Doll, Peto, Boreham, et al. (2004). Mortality in relation to smoking: 50 years' observations on male British doctors. BMJ 328: 1519.

## Harms of smoking on adolescent health

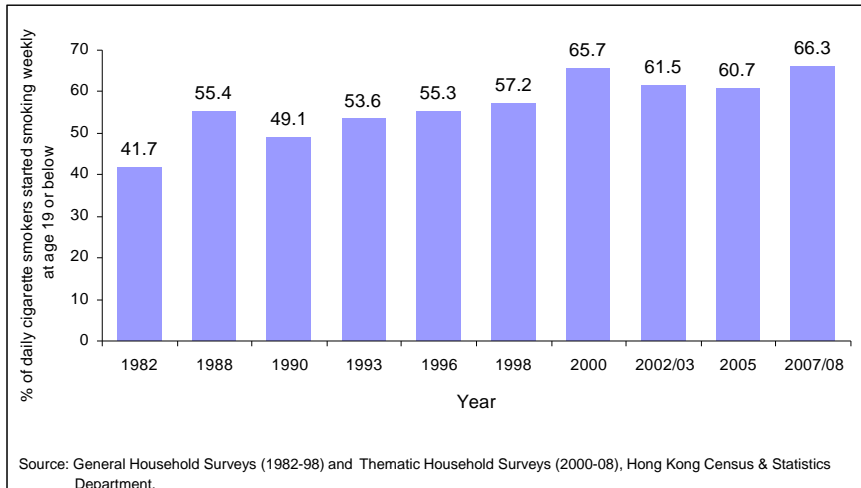
- Reduces lung function
- Increases risk of respiratory illness and atherosclerosis
- Diminishes overall physical health

## HK: Age started smoking cigarette weekly

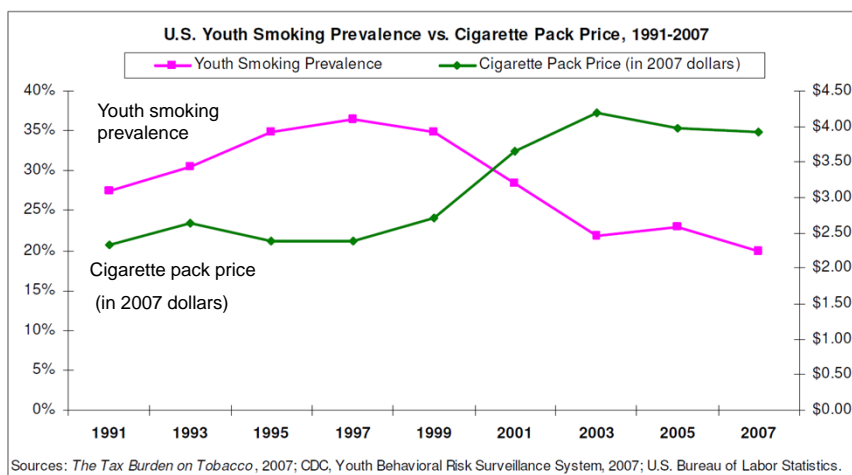


Source: Thematic Household Surveys, Hong Kong Census & Statistics Department

## HK: Percentage of smokers who started smoking cigarette weekly at age 19 or below



## US: Youth are especially sensitive to cigarette price



## World Health Organisation

“Increasing the price of tobacco products through significant tax increases is the single most effective way to decrease tobacco use and to encourage current users to quit.” (WHO, 2009)



1. World Health Organisation (WHO) Report. (2009). WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2009.

## World Bank

“The most effective way to deter children from taking up smoking is to increase taxes on tobacco. High prices prevent some children and adolescents from starting and encourage those who already smoke to reduce their consumption.” (World Bank, 1999)



1. World Bank. (1999). Curbing the Epidemic: governments and the economics of tobacco control.

## Secondary 1-5 student surveys

- Five surveys among Secondary 1-5 students (aged 12-18) were conducted by the School of Public Health, HKU between 2003 and 2011

Year	09/2003 to 04/2004	11/2006 to 03/2007	11/2007 to 05/2008	12/2009 to 05/2010	10/2010 to 01/2011
No. of schools	85	43	32	18	79
No. of students	36,612	24,726	18,278	12,091	53,504

## Methods

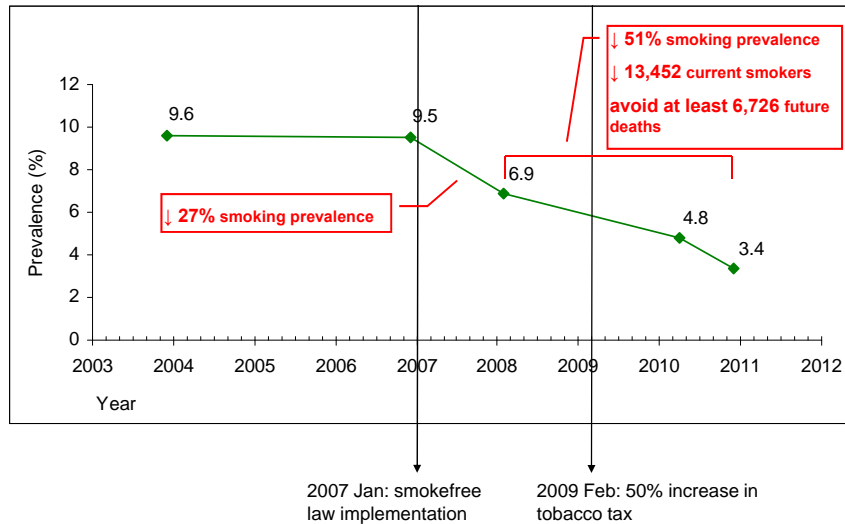
- Anonymous territory-wide school-based surveys
- Current smoking defined as
  - any cigarette smoking in the past 30 days

During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?

① 0 days ② 1-2 days ③ 3-5 days ④ 6-9 days ⑤ 10-19 days ⑥ 20-29 days ⑦ 30 days

- All data were weighted using school enrolment data from Education Bureau

## Prevalence of current smoking among S1-S5 students



## Impacts of tobacco control measures

- 2007 Jan: smokefree law implementation
  - current smoking dropped from 9.5% to 6.9%
  - 27% reduction
  - prevented 10,886 adolescents from smoking
- 2009 Feb: 50% increase in tobacco tax
  - current smoking dropped from 6.9% to 4.8% in early 2010 and 3.4% in late 2010
  - 51% reduction
  - prevented 13,452 adolescents from smoking

## Conclusions

- With 50% increase in tobacco tax in 2009
  - Adolescent current smoking rate dropped from 6.9% in 2008 to 3.4% in late 2010
  - Reduced smoking prevalence by 51%
  - Prevented 13,452 adolescents from smoking
  - Prevented at least 6,726 future tobacco deaths
- The proposed 40% rise in tobacco tax will predictably further curb adolescent smoking
- This powerful fiscal tool that can save thousands of lives rests in the hands of legislators
- The Government & the legislators must act decisively to protect public health, especially the present and future health of children

## Acknowledgements

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- Food and Health Bureau
- University Research Committee, University of Hong Kong

## Youth Quitline



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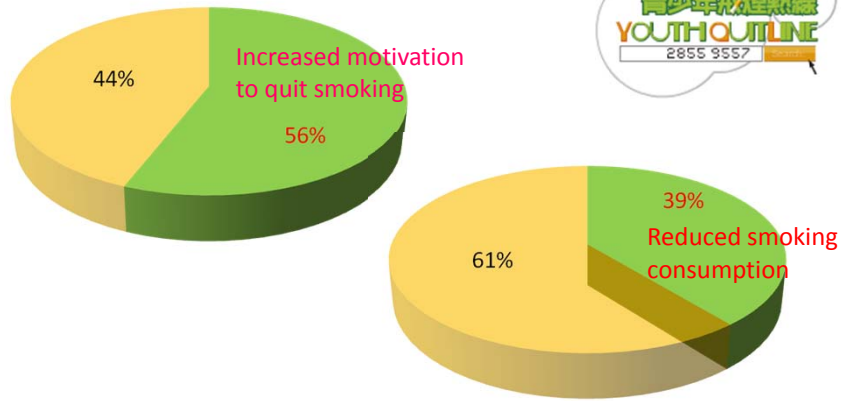
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### Youth Quitline (2855 9557)

- Established in 2005 to help young smokers aged from 12 to 25 to quit smoking
- Peer-led: university students are trained to be counselors
- Follow-up calls are made to check the progress and offer encouragement



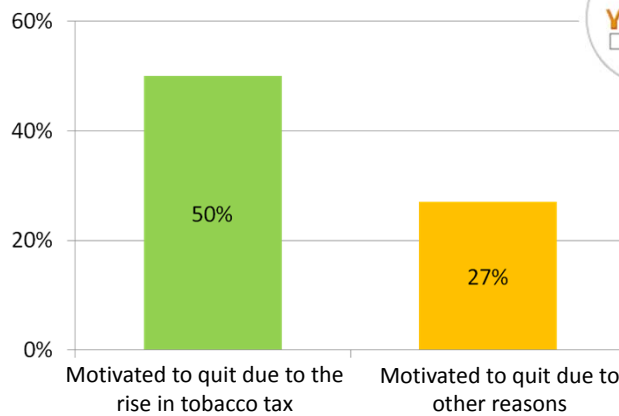
## The impact of the 2009 raise in tobacco tax on youth smokers



\*Responded by youth smokers who called the HKU Youth Quitline from Mar 2009 to Sep 2010

## The impact of the 2009 raise in tobacco tax on youth smokers

Quit rate at 6-month post telephone counseling\*



\*Did not smoke even one puff in the past 7 days