

Adolescent Smoking Behavior and Countermeasure in Japan

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【Social campaigning against tobacco】

The World Health Organization has been campaigning against tobacco on a global scale. In response, the European Union has already reached an agreement concerning regulation of tobacco sales and bans on tobacco advertisements. In the area of tobacco control, Japan's health policy lags behind other industrial countries. Recently, smoke-free environments have become available.

Restrictions on nighttime operations of vending machines, and commercial on TV and radio started around 1998. Furthermore, five medical societies including the Japan Lung Cancer Society put forth some proposals aimed at prevention of tobacco use, and the Japan Medical Association and Japanese Association of School Health began an anti-smoking campaign. “The Health Promotion Law” was implemented in 2003 and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare indicated some goals in Healthy Japan 21 that included total protection against passive smoking in public places and the workplaces. Now, most public areas in buildings are designated for non-smoking.

【The countermeasures against smoking about adolescents】

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare indicated some goals in Healthy Japan 21 (2000) that included a zero-percent rate of tobacco use by minors.

The Japanese “Law on Prohibition of Smoking by Minors” forbids drinking alcohol and smoking by person under the age of 20. So, smoking was prohibited since 1603 but the law was ignored.

“The Law on Prohibition of Smoking by Minors” was revised at the end of 2000 for the first time in half a century. The maximum fine for selling tobacco to minors was raised to 500,000 yen. But the proportion of adolescents smokers who usually purchased cigarettes from vending machines increased in 2000, in spite of the 1998 introduction of restrictions on nighttime operations (Osaki 2005). There are still many (620000) tobacco vending machines on the streets.

【The countermeasures against smoking in schools】

In Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology issued a notice in 1995 calling for bans on smoking in schools in principle. Smoke-free schools have been spread voluntarily all over Japan since 2002.

【Smoking prevention education】

The smoking rate among children in Japan increases rapidly from the upper-grades of elementary school. Therefore, smoking prevention education during elementary school is essential. The contents necessary for effective smoking prevention education considering the results of evaluation research are as follows: short-term and long-term effects of smoking, psychosocial factors associated with smoking initiation, social skills to resist social influences such as peer pressure and the advertising promoting smoking, and social measures against smoking. In addition, to improve effectiveness, it is suggested that there be a correlation smoking prevention education with life skill education, and cooperation between families and the community. (Nishioka, et al. 2005)

【Smoking rate of adolescents】

The smoking rate among junior high school boys decreased in 2004 compared with that in previous researches. (Osaki, et al. 2006)

Smoking rate at 3rd grade of high school students

Year	Boys	Girls	(%)
1996	36.9	15.6	
2000	36.9	15.8	
2004	23.5	9.7	

【Significance of preventing adolescent's tobacco use】

Adolescent's tobacco use prevention not only helps adolescents maintain their health but also leads to prevention of future long-term health problems such as lifestyle-related diseases and premature death. In addition, the number of adult tobacco users can be greatly decreased by preventing adolescent's tobacco use. Furthermore, adolescent's tobacco use can be a gateway to use of other drugs, so tobacco use prevention also serves as a way to prevent drug abuse. As such, adolescent's tobacco use prevention is of particular importance amongst measures to prevent tobacco use, but in order for adolescent's tobacco use prevention to work, families, schools, local communities, industry, the government and local governments have to make the utmost effort in terms of educational approaches and improvement of the environment from their respective standpoints, based on the concept of health promotion. (Recommendations concerning Youth Tobacco Use Prevention, Japanese Association of School Health 2001.11)