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Study: Smoking will kill one out of three young Chinese men

by Pamela Boykoff, CNN

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Story highlights

Lancet study: Higher rates of smoking among Chinese men mean more deaths

China grapples with high smoking rates, but its tobacco tax is considered low

Medical Sciences and the Chinese Center for Disease Control tracked the health effects of smoking over time in two large, geographically diverse studies. They found cigarette consumption has grown substantially for men in both urban and rural China over the last few decades while rates fell for women.



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(CNN)—Smoking deaths in China are set to triple to 3 million a year by 2050, according to a new study that examines the devastating toll of rising smoking rates on the country's male population.

The report, published in the British medical journal *The Lancet*, concludes that nearly two thirds of young Chinese men pick up smoking and, unless they stop, at least half of them will die from the habit.

Scientists from Oxford University, the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and the Chinese Center for Disease Control tracked the health effects of smoking over time in two large, geographically diverse studies. They found cigarette consumption has grown substantially for men in both urban and rural China over the last few decades while rates fell for women.

Urban males who started smoking before they turned 20 had twice the mortality rate of non-smokers, with substantially increased rates of death from smoking-linked pulmonary disease, lung cancer, heart disease and stroke.

"The first generation of men to experience the full hazards will probably be those born during the 1970s or 1980s," according to the report.

For comparison, smoking rates in the United States are less than half what they were 50 years ago. Smoking causes one in five deaths in the United States each year, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Beijing rolls out China's toughest smoking ban... will it work?](#)

China now consumes a third of the world's cigarettes. Authorities raised cigarette taxes in May, but it's still an incredibly cheap country to light up. A pack of a popular brand like Zhongnanhai costs about \$1.50. According to the Tobacco Atlas, 26% of the price of a packet of cigarettes is tax, compared with a WHO benchmark of 75%.

Income from tobacco sales and taxes are major sources of government revenue in China. In a commentary that accompanied the study, two public health experts argued that this arrangement "complicates" efforts to reduce public health implications from tobacco.

They also argued education efforts are hindered by common myths about smoking — including "the belief that protective biological mechanisms specific to Asian populations make smoking less hazardous, that it is easy to quit smoking, and that tobacco use is an intrinsic and ancient part of Chinese culture."

A survey from the World Health Organization in August found that knowledge about the dangers of smoking is improving in China, but still has a long way to go. Half of adults questioned did not know that smoking can cause strokes or heart disease. More than one in ten people did not know second hand smoke can cause lung disease in children.

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