Combustible and Smokeless Tobacco Use Among High School Athletes—United States, 2001-2013

**MMWR Introduction**

During 2001-2013, current smokeless tobacco use increased significantly among high school athletes, but not among high school non-athletes. Furthermore, athletes reported higher use of smokeless tobacco, but lower use of combustible tobacco products, than non-athletes. The lower use of combustible tobacco products among athletes might reflect an awareness of the adverse consequences of smoking on athletic performance, including reduced lung and cardiovascular function, reduced overall fitness, and poor wound healing. However, the higher smokeless tobacco use among athletes compared with non-athletes suggests athletes might perceive these products as being harmless, socially acceptable, or even a way to enhance athletic performance. Using smokeless tobacco products, however, can adversely affect athletic performance and cause disease and premature death as they contain nicotine, toxins, and carcinogens. Several celebrated US athletes with a history of smokeless tobacco use have been diagnosed with—or died from—oral cancer. Hence, efforts are warranted to educate youth about the dangers of use of all forms of tobacco.

Implementing and enforcing tobacco-free policies that prohibit all tobacco use in school campuses and all public recreational facilities—including stadiums, parks, and school gymnasiums—by players, coaches, referees, and fans could help de-normalize and reduce use of smokeless tobacco and other forms of tobacco among student athletes. In addition, continued implementation of other evidence-based interventions outlined in the CDC Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs is also critical to reducing all forms of tobacco use among youth. These include increasing tobacco prices, warning about the dangers of tobacco use, and increasing access to smoking cessation resources.

**MMWR Highlights**

**Current smokeless tobacco use among US high school students, 2001-2013**
- Current smokeless tobacco use among all high school students rose from 8.2% in 2001 to 8.8% in 2013.
- Current smokeless tobacco use among high school student athletes rose from 10.0% in 2001 to 11.1% in 2013.
- Current smokeless tobacco use among high school student non-athletes remained steady at 5.9% from 2001 to 2013.

**Current combustible tobacco use among US high school students, 2001-2013**
- Current combustible tobacco use among all high school students declined from 31.5% in 2001 to 19.5% in 2013.
- Current combustible tobacco use among high school student athletes declined from 29.7% in 2001 to 18.0% in 2013.
- Current combustible tobacco use among high school student non-athletes declined from 33.7% in 2001 to 21.3% in 2013.

**Current use of any tobacco product among US high school students, 2001-2013**
- Current use of any tobacco product among all high school students declined from 33.9% in 2001 to 22.4% in 2013.
- Current use of any tobacco product among high school student athletes declined from 32.8% in 2001 to 22.0% in 2013.
- Current use of any tobacco product among high school student non-athletes declined from 35.1% in 2001 to 22.7% in 2013.