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R-Rated Movies May Boost Teens' Smoking Rates

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TUESDAY, March 6 (HealthDay News) -- White American teens who see lots of R-rated movies and have fewer television viewing restrictions are more likely to start smoking than other white teens, a new study shows.

This association is not evident in black teens, researchers report in the March issue of the journal Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.

Christine Jackson of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in Chapel Hill, N.C. and colleagues interviewed 735 teens, ages 12 to 14, attending 14 public middle schools in the southeastern United States.

In an initial interview conducted in the fall of 2001, students were asked about the types of movies they watched, their TV viewing habits, and whether their parents restricted the kinds of television shows they watched. The students were next interviewed in 2004 about their smoking behavior.

Jackson's team found that white adolescents with high exposure to R-rated movies were nearly seven times more likely to start smoking compared to white teens who didn't see as many R-rate movies.

Even after they adjusted for other risk factors -- such as having a friend who smokes, lack of parental involvement, and poor academic performance -- the researchers found that white teens who watched more R-rated movies were still three times more likely to start smoking.

The study also found that white teens with parents who did not supervise their television viewing were also more likely to start smoking.

These associations were not noted in black adolescents. The reasons for this racial disparity aren't known. Black teens identify better with black characters rather than white characters in television and the movies, the researchers noted. So, since white actors are more common than black actors, movies and television may have less influence on the smoking behavior of black teens, the researchers suggested.

"Research is needed to identify the antecedents of risky media use and to understand how audience attributes, including race and other factors, moderate the effects of risky media use on health-related behaviors," the authors concluded.

More information

The American Cancer Society has more about [child and teen tobacco use](#).

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