The overwhelming majority of smokers begin tobacco use before they reach adulthood. Among those young people who smoke, nearly one-quarter smoked their first cigarette before they reached the age of ten.

Several factors increase the risk of youth smoking. These include tobacco industry advertising and promotion, easy access to tobacco products, and low prices. Peer pressure plays an important role through friends’ and siblings’ smoking. Other risk factors associated with youth smoking include having a lower self-image than peers, and perceiving that tobacco use is normal or “cool.”

Many studies show that parental smoking is associated with higher youth smoking. While the most serious effects of tobacco use normally occur after decades of smoking, there are also immediate negative health effects for young smokers. The younger a person begins to smoke, the greater the risk of caused diseases such as cancer or heart disease.

The highest youth smoking rates can be found in Central and Eastern Europe, sections of India, and some of the Western Pacific islands. Fewer than 5% of young people in Central and Eastern Europe think girls who smoke look more attractive. Fewer than 5% of young people in Fiji, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe think boys who smoke have more friends.

Over 30% of children smoked their first whole cigarette before age 10 in Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Palau, Poland, N.Mariana Islands and St.Lucia. Over 40% of young people in Fiji, Ghana,Malawi,Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe think boys who smoke have more friends.

50% of young people who continue to smoke will die from smoking.

40% of children worldwide are exposed to passive smoking at home.

“If younger adults turn away from smoking, the industry will decline, just as a population which does not give birth will eventually dwindle.” RJ Reynolds researcher, 1984