

7 Risk factor: tobacco

"From a short pleasure can come a long repentance."
French proverb

The public may believe that the major risk from cigarettes is lung cancer, but far more smokers develop cardiovascular disease – mainly heart attacks and stroke. In 1940, a link was identified between cigarette use and coronary heart disease, and there is now a huge body of scientific literature linking tobacco with CVD. The risks are much higher in people who started smoking before the age of 16. Tobacco use, other than smoking, and passive smoking are also implicated as CVD risks.

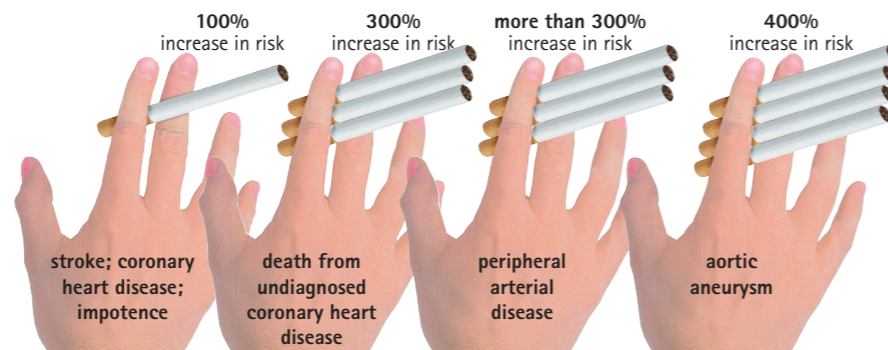
Smoking promotes CVD through several mechanisms. It damages the endothelium lining of the blood vessels, increases cholesterol plaques (fatty deposits in the arteries), increases clotting, raises LDL-cholesterol levels and lowers HDL, and promotes coronary artery spasm. Nicotine accelerates the heart rate and raises blood pressure.

A gene has been discovered that increases smokers' risk of developing coronary heart disease by up to four times. Around a quarter of the population carries one or more copies of this gene.

Women smokers are at particular risk, with a higher risk of heart attack than male smokers. Women who smoke only three to five cigarettes a day double their risk of heart attack, while men who smoke six to nine cigarettes a day double their risk.

Cardiovascular risks of smoking

Percentage increase in risk



Cardiovascular risks of passive smoking

Adults

- Harms, clogs, and weakens arteries
- Heart attack, angina, stroke

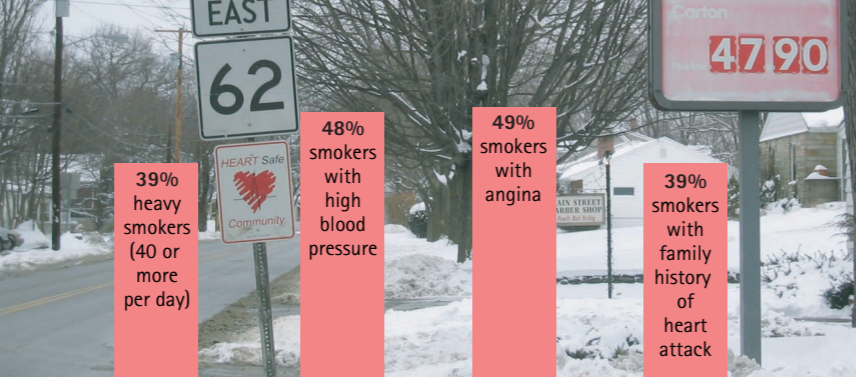
Children

- Reduces amount of oxygen the blood can carry
- Damages arteries
- Early-onset atherosclerosis
- Sudden infant death syndrome (cot death)

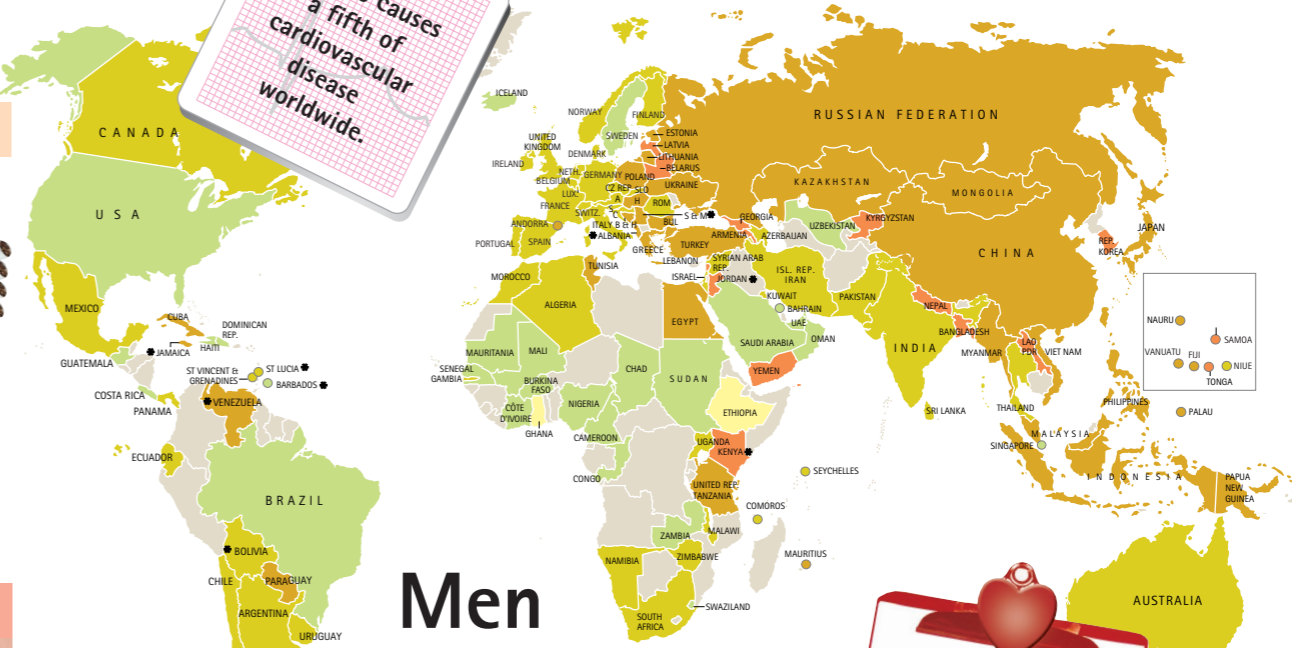
In the USA, up to 62 000 people die each year from heart disease caused by passive smoking.

Smokers don't know the risks of heart attack

Percentage of smokers in the USA who believe they have higher-than-average risk of heart attack 1999



Tobacco causes a fifth of cardiovascular disease worldwide.



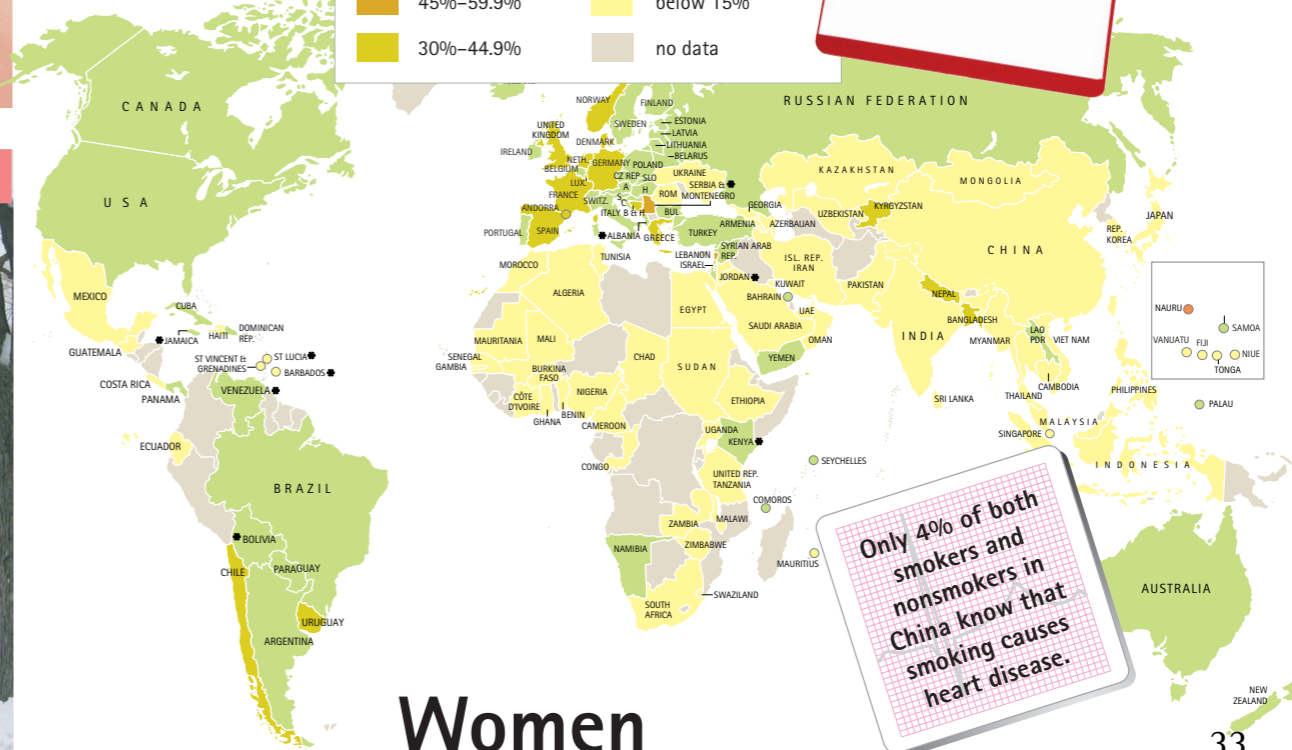
Men

Smoking prevalence

Percentage of people aged 18 years and above who smoke 2003 or latest available data
• data from urban populations only

- 60% and above
- 45%–59.9%
- 30%–44.9%
- 15%–29.9%
- below 15%
- no data

Quitting smoking effectively reduces cardiovascular risk to close to that of a person who has never smoked.



Women

Only 40% of both smokers and nonsmokers in China know that smoking causes heart disease.