



## Smoking & Tobacco Use

Home > Data and Statistics > Fast Facts and Fact Sheets

# Smoking in the Movies

## Background

- The Surgeon General's Report concluded that exposure to onscreen smoking in movies causes young people to start smoking.<sup>1</sup>
  - If current rates continue, 5.6 million youth alive today who are projected to die from tobacco related diseases.<sup>2</sup>
  - Giving an R rating to future movies with smoking would be expected to reduce the number of teen smokers by nearly 1 in 5 (18%),<sup>2,3</sup> preventing up to 1 million deaths from smoking among children alive today.<sup>2</sup>

### On This Page

Background

Additional 2017 Findings

Conclusions

References

### Movie Ratings<sup>4</sup>

**G** (General Audience): All ages admitted

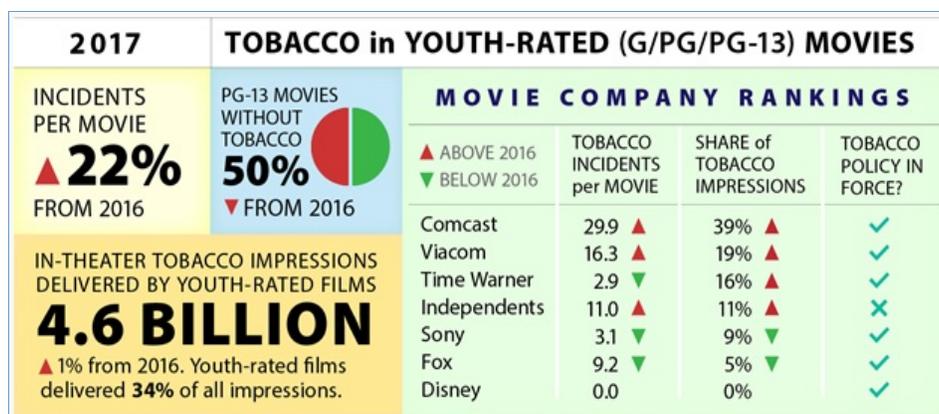
**PG** (Parental Guidance Suggested): Some material may not be suitable for children

**PG-13** (Parents Strongly Cautioned): Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13 years

**R** (Restricted): Under 17 years requires accompanying parent or adult guardian

**NC-17** (Adults Only): No one 17 years or under admitted

- From 2002 to 2017:
  - Almost half (45%) of top-grossing movies in the United States were rated PG-13.
  - 6 of every 10 PG-13 movies (57%) showed smoking or other tobacco use.
  - The percentage of youth-rated movies (G, PG, PG-13) that were smokefree increased from 35% to 62%; however, in youth-rated movies that showed any smoking, the average number of tobacco incidents per movie approached historically high levels in 2016 [n=34] and were nearly as high [n=29] in 2017.<sup>5</sup>
- The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the studios' organization that assigns ratings, provides a "smoking label" along with the regular rating for some movies that contain smoking. However, almost 9 of every 10 (89%) youth-rated, top-grossing movies with smoking do not carry an MPAA "smoking label."<sup>5</sup>
- All six major movie companies that belong to MPAA have published individual policies addressing tobacco depictions in their movies.<sup>5</sup>
  - Disney (2004)
  - Time Warner's Warner Bros. (2005)
  - Comcast's Universal (2007)
  - Fox and Sony (2012)
  - Viacom's Paramount (2013)



Text description of this infographic is available on a separate page.

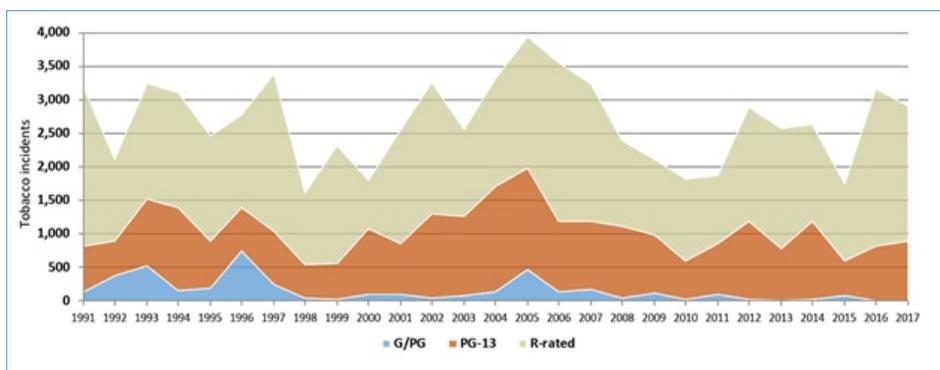
Notes:

- A "tobacco incident" is one occurrence of smoking or other tobacco use in a movie.
- "Incidents" are a measure of the number of occurrences of smoking or other tobacco use in a movie.
- A "tobacco impression" is one person seeing one incident.
- "Impressions" are a measure of total audience exposure.
- This report's movie sample comprises all movies that ranked among the top 10 in ticket sales ("top-grossing movies") in any week of their first-run release to U.S. theaters.

## Additional 2017 Findings<sup>5</sup>

- The percentage of PG-13 movies with tobacco incidents increased from 35% in 2016 to 50% in 2017, the highest level since 2009.
- In 2017, the number of tobacco incidents in the average youth-rated movie with tobacco (29 incidents) was 15% lower than in 2016 (34 incidents). The number in the average R-rated movie with tobacco (49 incidents) was nearly 30% lower than in 2016 (67 incidents).
- The total number of tobacco incidents in movies rated PG rebounded from 2016 to 2017 (from 4 to 10) but remained near the historic low.
- PG-13 movies included more tobacco incidents in 2017 (883) than they did in 2016 (811). The total number of incidents in youth-rated movies in 2017 (893) was 31% less than the number in 2002 (1,296).
- A significant downward trend occurred in the number of tobacco incidents in youth-rated films between 2005 and 2010, but incidents were essentially flat from 2010 through 2017. Had the average rate of decline in tobacco incidents per year observed between 2005 and 2010 been maintained, tobacco incidents would have been eliminated from all youth-rated films by early 2015.

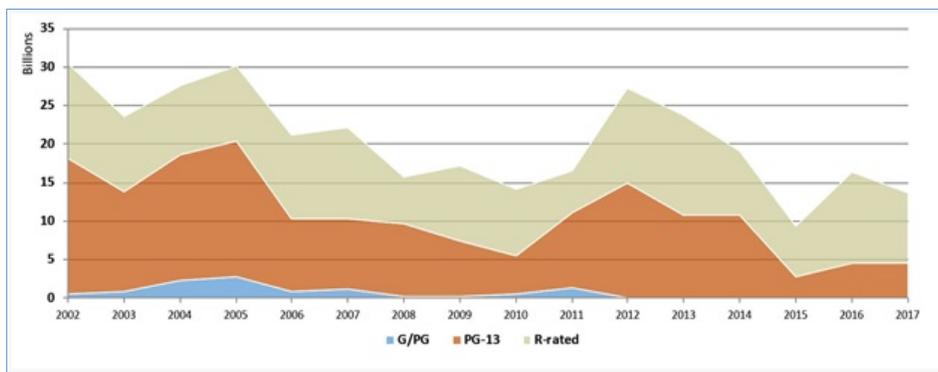
**Figure 1. Tobacco Incidents in Top-Grossing Movies by Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Rating, 1991–2017<sup>5</sup>**



[Text description of this graph](#) is available on a separate page.

- The number of tobacco incidents in movies varies by movie company. From 2010 to 2017:<sup>6</sup>
  - Tobacco incidents increased in youth-rated movies from Comcast, Time Warner, and independent movie companies with top-grossing movies in 2017.
  - Tobacco incidents decreased in youth-rated movies from:
    - Disney
    - Fox
    - Sony
    - Viacom

**Figure 2. In-Theater Tobacco Impressions by Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Rating, 2002–2017<sup>5</sup>**



[Text description of this graph](#) is available on a separate page.

## Conclusions

- Movie companies with tobacco depiction policies included tobacco in as many of their youth-rated movies in 2017 as they did in 2010 and each of these movies included 37% more tobacco incidents, on average.<sup>5</sup>
- The increase of tobacco incidents in PG-13 movies since 2010 is of particular public health concern because of the established causal relationship between youth exposure to smoking in movies and smoking initiation.<sup>6</sup>
- Reducing tobacco incidents that appear in youth-related movies would prevent the initiation of tobacco use among young people.<sup>1-3,5-7</sup>
- Opportunities exist for movie studios to reduce tobacco incidents that appear in youth-rated movies, including rating films with smoking as R.<sup>6,7</sup>
  - Other available interventions include certifying that no payments have been received by the producers and distributors for depicting tobacco use; and ending the onscreen depiction of actual tobacco brands.<sup>6,7</sup>
  - State and local health departments could also work with state agencies that manage movie subsidies to ensure that such subsidies do not go to films that include depictions of tobacco use.<sup>6</sup>
- An R rating for movies with tobacco use can potentially reduce the number of teen smokers by 18%<sup>2,3</sup>, preventing up to 1 million premature smoking deaths among youth alive today.

## References

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## For Further Information

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[Home](#) > [Data and Statistics](#) > [Fast Facts and Fact Sheets](#)

# Smoking in the Movies

## Text Descriptions of [Return to Smoking in the Movies Fact Sheet](#) Images

### Tobacco in Youth-Rated Movies<sup>2</sup>

- This infographic shows that 2017 youth-rated (G, PG, PG-13) movies included more smoking than the year before.
  - Incidents per movie increased 21%, from 9.0 to 10.9.
  - PG-13 movies that were tobacco-free decreased to 50% (30 of 60 movies) from 65% (43 of 66 movies).
  - Youth-rated movies delivered 4.6 billion tobacco impressions to theater audiences—a 59% increase from 2015.
- Performance by movie studio varied.
  - Comcast's Universal, which averaged a single tobacco incident in its youth-rated movies in 2015, had the most per youth-rated film in 2017 at 29.9.
  - The Walt Disney Company, which had the most tobacco incidents per youth-rated film in 2015 at 11.2, had no tobacco incidents in youth-rated films in 2017.
  - Comcast delivered the largest share of youth-rated tobacco impressions at 39% (1.8 billion of 4.6 billion), followed by Viacom's Paramount at 19% (891 million of 4.6 billion) and Time Warner's Warner Bros. at 16% (746 million of 4.6 billion).
- Two of the six major movie companies (Comcast and Viacom's Paramount), both with published corporate tobacco depiction policies, averaged more tobacco incidents in their 2017 youth-rated movies than in their 2016 movies. So did the independent movie companies with top-grossing films in 2017. The Walt Disney Company, Twenty-First Century Fox, Sony and Time Warner's Warner Bros., which also have published policies, averaged fewer tobacco incidents.

### Tobacco Incidents in Top-Grossing Movies by MPAA Rating, 1991–2017<sup>5</sup>

- This graph shows that the total number of tobacco incidents in movies has fluctuated over more than 20 years, ranging from a low of 1,612 incidents in 1998 to a high of 3,947 incidents in 2005.
- A 5-year reduction to 1,824 incidents reversed in 2010.
- After exceeding 2,500 incidents from 2011 to 2014, tobacco incidents in 2015 returned to a level somewhat below 2010, then rebounded to 3,163 incidents in 2016 and 2,914 in 2017.
- Movies rated G and PG accounted for fewer than 1 of every 100 (1%) tobacco incidents in 2017.
- Movies rated PG-13 accounted for 30 of every 100 (30%) incidents, up from 26 of every 100 (26%) incidents in 2016.

## In-Theater Tobacco Impressions by MPAA Rating, 2002–2017<sup>5</sup>

- The number of tobacco impressions delivered to domestic theater audiences reached 30.1 billion in 2005 and then decreased by half over the next 5 years.
- From 2010 to 2014, tobacco impressions delivered by PG-13 movies more than doubled, decreased 74% from 2014 to 2015, and returned to 2010 levels in 2016 and 2017.
- Youth-rated movies delivered 34% of all tobacco impressions in 2017, the second-lowest proportion of all in-theater tobacco impressions since at least 2002.
- The proportion of tobacco impressions delivered by movies rated G or PG fell from 8% in 2011 to less than 0.5%, on average, from 2012 to 2017.
- Almost all the 75% decline in tobacco impressions delivered by youth-rated movies since 2002 is explained by a decline in smoking in movies with larger budgets (more than \$50 million).
- Movies of all ratings delivered 13.7 billion tobacco impressions to moviegoers in 2017, up 47% from the 21st Century low of 9.3 billion in 2015.

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Content source: Office on Smoking and Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion