

Statistical bulletin

Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2023

Cigarette smoking habits among adults in the UK, including how many people smoke, differences between population groups, changes over time and use of e-cigarettes.

Contact:
Population Health Monitoring
Group
health.data@ons.gov.uk
+44 1329 444110

Release date:
1 October 2024

Next release:
To be announced

Notice

9 January 2025

Following the [Health and Social Care Statistical Outputs consultation](#) commissioned by the [Health and Social Care Statistics Leadership Forum](#), we are improving some of our statistical products, so they are more coherent and efficient. Additionally, we are ensuring that our resources are deployed in producing statistics for maximum possible benefit.

Full details of changes to this product, and our other health and social care products, are available in the [Health and Social Care Statistical Outputs Consultation Response](#). We welcome user feedback on our releases. Please use the contact details on individual publication web pages to share feedback.

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1 . Main points

- Around 6.0 million people aged 18 years and over (11.9%) smoked cigarettes in the UK in 2023; this is the lowest proportion of current smokers since records began in 2011, based on our estimates from the Annual Population Survey (APS).
- Those aged 25 to 34 years had the highest proportion of current smokers (14.0%) in the UK in 2023.
- Those aged 18 to 24 years have had the largest reduction in smoking prevalence (15.9 percentage points) between 2011 (25.7%) and 2023 (9.8%).
- Around 5.1 million adults aged 16 years and over (9.8%) currently use an e-cigarette daily or occasionally in Great Britain in 2023, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).
- E-cigarette use was highest among people aged 16 to 24 years in Great Britain, with 15.8% using e-cigarettes either daily or occasionally.

2 . Using and interpreting the statistics in this release

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) collects data on [adult smoking habits](#) through two main surveys. The Annual Population Survey (APS) gives headline indicators of the number of adults aged 18 years and over who smoke in the UK. The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) collects information on e-cigarette use among those aged 16 years and over in Great Britain (excluding Northern Ireland), as well as smoking habits and the intention to quit smoking.

Read more about these surveys in [Section 11: Data sources and quality](#).

The following guide explains what you can and cannot do when interpreting and using the statistics in this release.

You can

- Find smoking estimates, all of which fall within a range (or [confidence interval](#)) that shows the level of [uncertainty](#) around the estimate.
- Compare trends over time, but be aware that some declines, especially during 2020, could be because of sample sizes and methods changes.
- Examine trends in smoking habits by local authority, but we advise focusing on longer-term trends because short-term trends can vary more.

You cannot

- Compare smoking in the UK, from the Annual Population Survey (APS), with smoking and vaping in Great Britain, from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN); the surveys cover different geographical areas and define a current smoker differently.

Find more information on the statistics in this release in [Section 11: Data sources and quality](#). Further detail on our data collection and analysis methods is available in our [methodology article](#).

3 . Smoking in the UK and constituent countries

The Annual Population Survey (APS) gives headline indicators on the number of adults aged 18 years and over who smoke in the UK. In this survey, a smoker is defined as someone who smokes nowadays.

The estimated proportion of people who smoke in the UK has been falling since Annual Population Survey (APS) records began in 2011.

In 2023, 11.9% of adults aged 18 years or over (6.0 million people) were current smokers, according to APS data.

This is a decrease from 2022 (12.9% of the population), although not a statistically significant one. An increase or decrease is [statistically significant](#) if it is likely that chance, or the variable nature of the samples, did not cause it. However, this decrease follows a long-term downward trend. The proportion of current smokers has fallen by 8.3 percentage points since 2011 (20.2% of the population).

The APS provides the official measure of smoking prevalence in England. It is used to monitor progress towards the UK government's target of achieving a smokefree England by 2030, with smoking prevalence at 5% or lower.

Smoking in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

In the UK in 2023, as shown in Figure 1, the percentage of adult smokers in:

- England was 11.6%
- Wales was 12.6%
- Scotland was 13.5%
- Northern Ireland was 13.3%

Official smoking prevalence estimates for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland should be taken from devolved health or national surveys (see [Section 8: Other UK data sources on smoking prevalence](#)).

Figure 1: Smoking prevalence continued to fall in all countries of the UK in 2023

Current smokers as a percentage of all persons aged 18 years and over, 2011 to 2023

Notes:

1. We have weighted the figures to account for methodological changes in 2020, and to ensure users can compare estimates for 2020 onwards with estimates for previous years.
2. For Northern Ireland, the estimate over time has been more variable because of the smaller sample size.

4 . Local authority smoking prevalence

Current smoker estimates for each local authority (Figure 2) can vary a lot from year to year because of small sample sizes. So, we have used a five-year average to give a clearer picture of how smoking prevalence varies between local authority areas, rather than focusing on one year's figures. You can still find annual smoking estimates by local authority in our accompanying [Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries dataset](#).

Local authorities with the highest average percentage of current smokers are:

- Fenland with 22.1%
- Blackpool with 21.3%

Local authorities with the lowest average percentage of current smokers are:

- Woking with 5.3%
- St Albans with 5.7%

Local authority data for England are also available in the [Smoking Profile tool](#) from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID). This tool allows users to compare local authorities within regions and benchmark a local authority against England or a regional average.

Smoking prevalence estimates by local authority area are based on smaller sample sizes, and therefore fluctuate more each year than national-level estimates. So, we have used a five-year average to compare smoking prevalence between local authority areas.

Figure 2: The average percentage of current smokers by local authority of the UK

Percentage who were current smokers, all people aged 18 years and over by local authority, UK, 2019 to 2023

Notes:

1. The averages presented are 5-year rolling averages, calculated using data from 2019 to 2023, where available.
2. The 5-year rolling estimates have ranges of uncertainty (confidence intervals), which can be found in the accompanying data download.
3. North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire averages are based on a 2-year average (2022 and 2023), because of boundary changes.
4. City of London and Buckinghamshire Unitary Authority averages are based on a 3-year average (2021 to 2023), because of boundary changes.
5. Official smoking prevalence estimates for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland should be taken from devolved health or national surveys.

5 . Percentage of smokers by age, sex and other personal characteristics

Men were more likely to smoke than women in the UK in 2023, as seen in previous years. Around 3.4 million men (13.7%) and around 2.6 million women (10.1%) reported being current smokers.

When considering the population by age (Figure 3):

- those aged 25 to 34 years were most likely to smoke (14.0%)
- those aged 65 years and over were least likely to smoke (8.2%)
- those aged 18 to 24 years have seen the largest reduction in smoking prevalence between 2011 (25.7%) and 2023 (9.8%)

Figure 3: People aged 25 to 34 years continued to have the highest smoking prevalence

Percentage who were current smokers, all persons by age group, UK, 2011 to 2023

Characteristics of current cigarette smokers in the UK

Smoking prevalence is known to be associated with a variety of characteristics, such as relationship status, education level and socio-economic status.

When looking at smoking prevalence by economic activity status in the UK in 2023, those who were defined as unemployed had a higher proportion of current smokers (19.7%), compared with those who were in paid employment (11.4%) and those who were economically inactive (12.2%).

Of those who were classified as being in a “routine and manual” socio-economic classification, according to the [National Statistics Socio-economic Classification](#) (NS-SEC), 20.2% were current smokers, compared with 7.9% of “managerial and professional occupations”. This follows the same trend since data collection began in 2014 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Smoking prevalence continued to be higher in routine and manual occupations than in managerial and professional occupations in 2023

The percentage who were current smokers by socio-economic status, all persons aged 18 to 64 years, UK, 2014 to 2023

Notes:

1. Socio-economic status is defined using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC).
2. We have restricted the data to those of working age, aged between 18 and 64 years.

Of people who had no qualifications, 27.4% were current smokers in 2023. This is higher than among those who reported their highest level of education as “Other qualifications” (21.8%), and those who reported GCSEs as their highest level of education (18.0%). Those who reported a degree or equivalent as their highest level of education had the lowest percentage of current smokers (5.8%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The highest percentage of current smokers were among those who reported they had no qualifications

Percentage who were current smokers by highest level of educational attainment, all people aged 18 years and over, UK, 2014 to 2023

A wider range of data on the characteristics of cigarette smokers from the APS is available in our accompanying dataset. This includes estimates by:

- employment status
- relationship status
- housing tenure
- country of birth
- ethnicity
- religion

These data for England are also available in the [Smoking Profile tool](#) from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.

More information on smoking prevalence by socio-economic status can be found in our [Deprivation and the impact on smoking prevalence in England and Wales: 2017 to 2021 bulletin](#).

6 . Quitting smoking

In this section, we describe data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN), which covers adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain. In the OPN, a smoker is someone who reports smoking cigarettes, even only occasionally.

The percentage of adults in Great Britain aged 16 years and over who said they smoked cigarettes decreased from 11.2% in 2022 to 10.5% in 2023. This continues the downward trend seen since 1974.

This is in-line with the reduction in smoking prevalence seen in the Annual Population Survey (APS), which covers the UK and adults aged 18 years and over.

The percentage of people who indicated that they had previously smoked and had now quit increased to 70.9% in 2023, compared with 69.4% in 2022 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: The percentage of previous cigarette smokers who have quit continued to increase

The percentage of current smokers, and those who had previously smoked and have quit, all people aged 16 years and over, Great Britain, 1974 to 2023

Notes:

1. The percentage of cigarette smokers who have quit is the percentage of all those who said that they have smoked cigarettes regularly who do not currently smoke.
2. From March 2020, the survey moved to weekly data collection.
3. From 25 August 2021, the survey moved to fortnightly data collection.
4. Data are unweighted before 2000. From 2000 onwards, they are weighted.
5. We collected data on cigarette use every two years before 2000.
6. Information on the changes in legislation and government policy can be found on the [Action on Smoking and Health \(ASH\) website](#).

Of the people who currently smoked in 2023, 55.9% intended to quit smoking. Almost a quarter of current smokers (23.8%) intended to quit within the next three months.

Current smokers who intended to quit in the next three months were more likely to wait longer to have their first cigarette of the day (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Current smokers who intended to quit in the next three months waited longer to have their first cigarette of the day

Percentage of current smokers by time waited until first cigarette of the day and intention to quit, Great Britain, 2023

Notes:

1. The data refer to the amount of time cigarette smokers typically waited until they had their first cigarette after waking.

7 . E-cigarette use in Great Britain

Data for e-cigarette use come from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN), which covers adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain.

An estimated 5.9% of people aged 16 years and over in Great Britain reported using an e-cigarette daily in 2023, up from 5.2% in 2022.

A further 3.9% reported using an e-cigarette occasionally, up from 3.5% in 2022 (Figure 8).

This equates to around 5.1 million e-cigarette users in Great Britain.

Figure 8: The percentage of current daily e-cigarette users increased in 2023, compared with 2022

Percentage of daily and occasional e-cigarette users, Great Britain, 2022 and 2023

Current and ex-smokers were more likely to report using an e-cigarette in 2023 (31.6% and 18.7%, respectively).

Around 2.8% of those who had never smoked reported using an e-cigarette daily or occasionally.

The number of people who had never smoked but reported using an e-cigarette daily doubled to 1.2% (around 400,000 people) between 2022 and 2023.

When looking at the whole population, whether they smoked cigarettes or not, people more likely to use an e-cigarette were:

- men (11.0%), compared with women (8.5%)
- people aged 16 to 24 years (15.8%) (Figure 9)

Figure 9: Daily or occasional e-cigarette use was highest in people aged 16 to 24 years in 2023

Percentage of daily or occasional e-cigarette users by age, Great Britain, 2022 and 2023

E-cigarette use has continued to increase most substantially among younger people aged 25 to 34 years.

The percentage of men aged 25 to 34 years who were daily e-cigarette users rose to 10.2% in 2023, from 7.4% in 2022. However, this increase was not statistically significant.

Of women aged 16 to 24 years, 8.7% were daily e-cigarette users in 2023. This is the highest usage recorded in this group since data collection began in 2014. While the increase between 2022 and 2023 was not statistically significant, it follows a large increase between 2021 and 2022 (4.8 percentage points).

8 . Other UK data sources on smoking prevalence

Health surveys in the devolved countries of the UK provide official estimates of smoking in each country. Each country uses these surveys to track progress against their targets to reduce smoking. These are:

- the Northern Ireland Health Survey, which shows that [14% of adults smoked cigarettes in 2022 to 2023](#)
- the National Survey for Wales, which shows that [13% of adults smoked cigarettes in April 2022 to March 2023](#)
- the Scottish Health Survey, which shows that [15% of adults smoked cigarettes in 2022](#)

Information about cigarette smoking is also available in the [Smoking Profile tool](#) from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID). The tool gives data on a wide range of indicators related to the smoking of cigarettes, including:

- different measures of prevalence in adults and young people
- smoking-related mortality
- the [wider impacts of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) on health](#)

The [Health Survey for England](#) and the [Smoking Toolkit Study](#) (non-Government Statistical Service) also collect data on smoking habits and e-cigarettes.

NHS Digital also collects data on [smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England](#).

9 . Data on adult smoking habits in the UK

[Smoking habits in the UK and its constituent countries](#)

Dataset | Released 1 October 2024

Annual data on the proportion of adults who currently smoke, the proportion of ex-smokers and proportion of those who have never smoked, by sex and age.

[E-cigarette use in Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 1 October 2024

Annual data on the proportion of adults in Great Britain who use e-cigarettes, by different characteristics such as age, sex and cigarette smoking status.

[E-cigarette use in England](#)

Dataset | Released 1 October 2024

Annual data on the proportion of adults in England who use e-cigarettes, by different characteristics such as age, sex and cigarette smoking status.

[Adult smoking habits in Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 1 October 2024

Annual data on the proportion of adults in Great Britain who smoke cigarettes, cigarette consumption, the proportion who have never smoked cigarettes and the proportion of smokers who have quit, by sex and age over time.

[Adult smoking habits in England](#)

Dataset | Released 1 October 2024

Annual data on the proportion of adults in England who smoke cigarettes, cigarette consumption, the proportion who have never smoked cigarettes and the proportion of smokers who have quit, by sex and age over time.

10 . Glossary

Cigarette smokers who have quit

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) defines cigarette smokers who have quit as those who said they have smoked cigarettes regularly, but do not currently smoke. This is provided as a proportion of those who have ever smoked cigarettes regularly.

Current cigarette smokers

The Annual Population Survey (APS) defines current cigarette smokers as those who said they smoke cigarettes nowadays. The OPN defines current cigarette smokers as those who said they smoked cigarettes, even if occasionally. Current cigarette smokers are provided as a proportion of those in the population.

Current e-cigarette users

The OPN defines current e-cigarette users as those who said they currently use e-cigarettes, a vaping device, or both. Current e-cigarette users are provided as a proportion of those in the population.

Economic activity

We use the International Labour Organization (ILO) definitions of economic activity. Unemployed people are those who are not currently in work but who are looking for work. The group “economically inactive” contains those who are not in work, and not looking for work; this includes retired people and students. More information on economic activity can be found in our [Labour Force Survey user guide](#).

Sampling and non-sampling error

The people who respond to the survey may differ from the population because of random sampling (sampling error), or because of other factors, for example, because some could not be contacted or refused to participate (non-sampling error). These non-random effects can lead to sample bias if they are not fully adjusted for through weighting.

Statistical significance

Statistical significance has been determined using [95% confidence intervals](#). This provides the range of values that we are 95% confident the true value lies within. The 95% confidence intervals for the estimates are available in our [accompanying datasets](#). We have deemed two estimates to be statistically different from one another if their confidence intervals do not overlap. One limitation of this approach is that some pairs of estimates that are statistically different from one another will not be identified as such.

Survey mode

Survey mode is the method that is used to collect information from respondents. There are different types of survey mode, such as face-to-face, telephone, online and mixed mode.

11 . Data sources and quality

Annual Population Survey

Data on smoking habits in the UK come from the Annual Population Survey (APS). The survey covers residents of the UK aged 18 years and over. For more information on APS survey methodology, see our [APS Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#).

The change from a mixed mode to telephone-only data collection for the APS, introduced at the end of March 2020, resulted in a potentially unrepresentative sample. The change in the mode of data collection meant our smoking prevalence estimates for 2020 were not comparable with the estimates of previous years. We have updated our weighting methodology to improve comparability of our smoking prevalence estimates for 2020 and subsequent years. For more details about this update, see our [Adult smoking habits in the UK methodology](#).

The APS is the official measure of smoking prevalence in England. It is used to monitor and track progress towards a smokefree generation, a goal outlined in [The Khan review: making smoking obsolete](#).

The initial target of the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC's) [Tobacco Control Plan](#) was to reduce smoking prevalence among adults in England to 12% or less by the end of 2022. This has been replaced by a new target: achieving a smokefree England by 2030, with smoking prevalence at 5% or lower.

DHSC's recently published policy paper [Stopping the start: Our new plan to create a smoke-free generation](#) details important measures to achieve this goal.

Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Data on smoking and e-cigarette use for Great Britain for those aged 16 years and over come from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN). In March 2020, the OPN was transformed from a monthly to weekly omnibus survey to understand how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was affecting life in Great Britain. As a result, the number of questions relating to smoking and vaping habits was greatly reduced. For more information on the OPN survey methodology, see our [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

The analysis reported in this bulletin used survey weights to make estimates representative of the population. Survey weights take into account observed patterns of non-response and attrition, as well as the distribution of population characteristics, like sex and age, where someone lives, and socio-economic characteristics.

Changes to this bulletin and user feedback

We have made some changes to this bulletin to test new ways of effectively communicating uncertainty in our data. These include:

- changes to headings and bulletin structure
- a new section on using and interpreting these statistics
- changes to chart styling and including confidence intervals
- changes to how we present local authority-level data

Please contact health.data@ons.gov.uk with any questions or feedback on these changes.

We will continue to gather user feedback before making a longer-term decision on these changes. Datasets published alongside this release will continue in their existing format.

Strengths

The APS and the OPN use standard methods for sampling and weighting strategies to limit the impact of bias. We carry out quality assurance procedures throughout the analysis stages to minimise the risk of processing error.

The sample size of the APS is large, approximately 192,265 respondents, making it possible to generate statistics for small geographic areas. The sample size of the OPN in 2022 was approximately 64,384 respondents.

Limitations

Comparisons between periods and groups must be done with caution, because estimates are provided from a sample survey. We have included [confidence intervals](#) in our [accompanying datasets](#) to present the sampling variability. These should be taken into account when assessing differences between periods, because true differences may not exist.

There are differences that should be considered when comparing estimates of smoking prevalence from different surveys. These differences are because of a range of factors, for example:

- different survey questions
- different methods of sampling
- different methods of weighting

Accredited official statistics

These accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#). They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and should be labelled “accredited official statistics”.

12 . Related links

[Office for Health Improvement and Disparities: Smoking Profile](#)

Web page | Updated as and when new data become available

Data on a wide range of indicators related to the smoking of cigarettes, including different measures of prevalence in adults and young people, smoking-related mortality, and the wider impacts of smoking on health.

[Smoking prevalence in the UK and the impact of data collection changes: 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 7 December 2021

Impact that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had on data collection, how this has influenced estimates of smoking prevalence and the comparability of these estimates.

13 . Cite this statistical bulletin

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 1 October 2024, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2023](#)