

Tobacco Use in Top-Grossing Movies—United States, 2010–2016

MMWR Introduction

The Surgeon General has concluded that there is a causal relationship between depictions of smoking in the movies and the initiation of smoking among young people. The more youths see smoking on screen, the more likely they are to start smoking; young people who are heavily exposed to onscreen smoking imagery are approximately two to three times as likely to begin smoking as are young people who receive less exposure.

To assess the recent extent of tobacco use imagery in youth-rated movies (G, PG, PG-13), data from Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down! (TUTD), a project of Breathe California of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails from 2010–2016 were analyzed and compared with previous reports.

The frequency and increase in tobacco incidents in PG-13 movies is of public health concern because these movies are rated appropriate for young people. Opportunities exist for movie studios to reduce tobacco incidents that appear in youth-related movies, including rating films with smoking R, which could help prevent or delay the initiation of tobacco use among young people.

MMWR Highlights

Number of tobacco incidents in US top-grossing movies with any tobacco incidents, by rating, 2010–2016

- Among all movies, the total number of tobacco incidents in top-grossing movies increased by 72% (from 1,824 to 3,145).
- Among G or PG movies, the total number of tobacco incidents decreased by 87% (from 30 to 4).
- Among PG-13 movies, the total number of tobacco incidents increased 43% (from 564 to 809).
- Among R rated movies, the total number of tobacco incidents increased 90% (from 1,230 to 2,332).

Number of U.S. top-grossing movies with any tobacco incidents by movie studio, 2016

- Comcast (Universal) had 0 G/PG movies, 2 PG-13 movies, and 2 R movies with tobacco incidents in 2016.
- Disney had 0 G/PG movies, 1 PG-13 movie, and 0 R movies with tobacco incidents in 2016.
- Fox had 0 G/PG movies, 4 PG-13 movies, and 4 R movies with tobacco incidents in 2016.
- Independent movie studios had 1 G/PG movie, 6 PG-13 movies, and 16 R movies with tobacco incidents in 2016.
- Sony had 0 G/PG movies, 3 PG-13 movies, and 5 R movies with tobacco incidents in 2016.
- Time Warner (Warner Bros.) had 0 G/PG movies, 2 PG-13 movies, and 4 R movies with tobacco incidents in 2016.
- Viacom (Paramount) had 0 G/PG movies, 5 PG-13 movies, and 4 R movies with tobacco incidents in 2016.