REGIONE DEL VENETO

Statistiche flash

Year 9 – December 2009

SMOKE LESS FOR A HEALTHIER LIFE

Tobacco smoke has been defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "the leading preventable cause of death in the world". In Italy it is certainly a public health issue as it is one of the biggest risk factors leading to chronic and debilitating illnesses which have a negative effect on the well-being of the population and on the country's economy. Scientific evidence has shown that passive smoking is also dangerous for health and that there is a correlation between exposure to passive smoke and the risk of developing cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses and lung cancer.

Bearing all this in mind, on 10th January 2005 law no. 3 of 16/01/2003 came into force. This is the "Sirchia" law, which enabled the smoking ban to be extended to all public places and to private places open to the public, in this way making the health of non-smokers the top priority. These regulations established the tenet that not-smoking should become the norm while smoking is the exception and envisaged the possible creation of places for smokers only.

This policy is one of the European Commission's priorities in its health action plans. The objective is to promote smoke-free lifestyles and to improve air quality indoors as well.

Regione Veneto devised a careful strategy a while ago to keep a check on smoking; there are three main points to focus on: preventing young people from starting smoking; helping smokers to quit; and protecting non-smokers from passive smoking.

Furthermore, in line with the ministerial plan entitled Guadagnare Salute (Gaining Health), measures to reduce smoking are to be integrated with measures on the other main risk factors (sedentary lifestyle, alcohol abuse and bad diet), paying attention not only to strictly health-related features but also to the environmental, social and economic factors which influence health, in particular those factors which influence individual choices and behaviour.

The international context

(*) Of the OECD countries, data is not available for Poland, Mexico and Hungary.

(*) Data from before 1993 for Veneto and Italy is for people aged 14 and over.

Source: processing by Regione Veneto – Direzione Sistema Statistico Regionale and Direzione Prevenzione on OECD and Istat data

Following instruction by the WHO, many states, both European and otherwise, have promulgated policies to battle tobacco addiction, with the aim of raising awareness about the dangers of active and passive smoking, changing people's perception of the problem and therefore encouraging improvements in lifestyles.

Of the OECD countries, Greece stands out with 4 declared smokers for every 10 people. Sweden comes in lowest with 14.5% of the population regular smokers and Italy is somewhere in the middle with 22.4%.

In Veneto smoking is slightly less common (20.9%), down 30% on 1983; the biggest decrease occurred during the 1980s, however, as recently the percentage of smokers has remained stable. It is still lower than the national average.

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Differences between genders

People aged 15 and over who smoke regularly (per 100 people of the same gender) – Years 1993:2008

Smokers by gender according to certain indicators which characterise the habit of smoking – Year 2005

	Men		Women		Total	
	Veneto	Italy	Veneto	Italy	Veneto	Italy
Average age for starting smoking	17.8	17.5	19.5	19.3	18.5	18.3
Average number of cigarettes smoked per day	14.2	16.4	10.8	12.6	12.9	14.9
Average length of time habit kept up for (years)	23.3	24.8	23.2	23.6	23.2	24.3
% of smokers who started before the age of 14	6.5	7.0	3.2	4.2	5.2	5.9

More men smoke than women, but the decrease in the overall number of smokers over the years is almost exclusively due to men changing to healthier lifestyles; while the percentage of female smokers has remained more or less unchanged over the last 15 years, the number of male smokers in Veneto decreased by 9.3%, reaching 25.3% in 2008. Last year's data shows a slight increase in the percentage of smokers of both sexes; this is slightly more marked for women, however. There are differences between men and women in the average age at which they take up smoking and the average number of cigarettes smoked per day.

The young and the very young

Young people aged 15–24 who smoke regularly (% values) Veneto and some OECD countries – Various years 2004:2008

Young people aged 15–24 who smoke regularly (per 100 young people of the same gender) Veneto – Years 1993:2008

The anti-smoking campaigns aimed at young people are an important instrument for safeguarding public health. The idea is that encouraging health should start at a young age when people are still much more open and receptive. As a matter of fact, international research shows that people who do not take up smoking during their teenage years are less likely to become regular smokers as adults, and that there is a strong correlation between the age at which one starts smoking and the likelihood of becoming a heavy smoker.
In comparison with some of the OECD countries, Italy comes in at the middle of the list with 21.7% of young people aged 15-24 smoking regularly. Unlike for the overall population, the percentage of young smokers is higher in Veneto than in the rest of Italy. There is still quite a difference between boys and girls.

Young people aged 11, 13 and 15 who have tried smoking (per 100 young people of the same gender). Veneto – Year 2006

Young people aged 11, 13 and 15 who smoke daily (per 100 young people of the same gender). Veneto – Year 2006

The most critical time for experimenting with smoking is during the teenage years; the need to push boundaries and to fit in means often teenagers are drawn to risks, such as experimenting with different substances. The percentage of pre-teenagers and teenagers who experiment with cigarettes increases with age: at just 13 years old, 2.5 teenagers out of 10 claim to have tried smoking, for 15-year-olds this number increases to 6 out of 10. For 18% of young people aged 15, smoking becomes then a daily habit, more for boys than girls, which confirms that the habit sets in to coincide with starting high school.

Source: processing by Regione Veneto – Direzione Sistema Statistico Regionale and Direzione Prevenzione on OECD, Istat and HBSC data

Those who quit and those who get worse

Ex-smokers aged 14 and over (per 100 people of the same age) Years 1995:2008

People aged 15 and over who smoke more than 20 cigarettes a day (per 100 regular smokers) – Years 1993:2008

For people who would like to stop smoking there are various types of help available: counselling from health workers, support groups, and individual support in health centres.
The number of smokers quitting smoking has increased over the years, more so in Veneto than in Italy as a whole. The number of heavy smokers (20 or more cigarettes per day) has also decreased. In 2008 they made up 3.9% of the population.

Some high-risk groups

People aged 14 and over suffering from chronic respiratory illnesses by smoking habit. Veneto – Year 2005 (per 100 people suffering from chronic respiratory illnesses) (*)

(*) People suffering from at least one of the following chronic respiratory illnesses: non-allergic asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema

People aged 14 and over suffering from chronic cardiovascular illnesses by smoking habit. Veneto – Year 2005 (per 100 people suffering from chronic cardiovascular illnesses) (**)

(**) People suffering from at least one of the following chronic cardiovascular illnesses: hypertension, heart attack, angina, other heart diseases, stroke, brain haemorrhage.

Smoking is linked to most of the chronic degenerative illnesses, such as respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses. In Veneto more than 60% of people who claim to have at least one chronic respiratory illness used to smoke or still do smoke: 45.1% quit but a good 18.1% carry on smoking. On the other hand, only 11.4% of those who suffer from a chronic cardiovascular illness keep on smoking.

Women aged 15 or over who had a child in the last 5 years by smoking habit whilst pregnant (% distribution) – Year 2005

Pregnant women are particularly at risk as the harmful effects of smoking also have repercussions on the soon-to-be-born child.
A number of studies has shown that smoking whilst pregnant, whether actively or passively, can cause complications such as miscarriages or premature births, as well as having consequences for the baby, such as a reduction in birth weight or other illnesses. Over time, the behaviour of pregnant women does appear to have become more responsible: out of 100 women who had a child recently and who smoked before becoming pregnant, 75 stopped smoking whilst pregnant and 22.5 cut down. Of those who stopped, only 26.4% did not take up smoking again after the birth.

Source: processing by Regione Veneto – Direzione Sistema Statistico Regionale and Direzione Prevenzione on Istat data

Passive smoking

Families with children by parents' smoking habits (per 100 families). Veneto – Year 2008

Passive smokers by age group. Veneto – Year 2008 (per 100 people of the same age) (*)

Up to 5 years old	31.8
From 6 to 14 years old	27.6
15 years and over	16.1
Total	18.8

(*) Passive smoker = a non-smoker who lives with at least one smoker

Passive smoke is that which is inhaled involuntarily by people who live in close contact with one or more active smokers and is the main pollutant of indoor air. Passive smokers are those who, at work, at home, or in public places, are forced to breathe other people's smoke. A recent study by WHO showed that the chances of getting lung cancer are 20-30% higher in non-smokers who live with a smoker and 12-19% higher for people exposed to passive smoke in their workplace. It is particularly dangerous for children as it has been linked to many illnesses, above all respiratory illnesses.
In Veneto in 31.5% of families with children, at least one of the two parents smokes. This means that almost a third of children aged up to 5 are exposed to passive smoke because they live with smokers. This percentage is around 28% for children aged 6 to 14.

Smoke-free environments

Perception of how often the smoking ban in public places is observed. Veneto – Year 2008

Perception of how often the smoking ban in the workplace is observed. Veneto – Year 2008

Permission to smoke in the house. Veneto – Year 2008

Regione Veneto, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, has been using the PASSI surveillance system for the last few years to monitor the results of the prevention campaigns, the changes in lifestyles and behaviour which have an effect on the health of the adult population (18-69 year olds). This has also enabled an investigation into whether the smoking ban is perceived to be observed in closed spaces, not only at work and in public places but also at home. According to three out of four people interviewed, the smoking ban in public places is always observed. As for inside the home, most Veneto citizens do not permit smoking under their roofs (86%).

Source: processing by Regione Veneto – Direzione Sistema Statistico Regionale and Direzione Prevenzione on Istat and Ministero del Lavoro, della Salute e delle Politiche Sociali – CCM and Regione del Veneto (PASSI surveillance) data

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