

ABSTRACT

Objectives: Within the Czech Republic there are missing reports on smoking prevalence, forms of smoking, sources of cigarettes or the influence of tobacco marketing on children younger than 12 years of age.

Methods: Between 2009 and 2012 we conducted a cross sectional survey with 3 887 children from Prague and 592 from the Usti Region, age 8-12 years old, from 51 primary schools. The survey was part of a school based smoking prevention program at participating schools.

Results: Among children, 23.3% reported some experience with smoking. Smoking experience was higher among boys, and children with family members who smoked. Cigarettes were the most common form of smoking (about 17 % of all respondents), followed by water-pipe (prevalence in Prague was 7.4% and 4.9% in Usti Region ($p = 0.030$)). Less than 1% of all children reported experience with marijuana. Relatives were the most commonly named source of cigarettes for first smoking experience (43.1%). Among children that reported smoking at least once a month, relatives were the most common source of cigarettes (32.5%), and 15.5% reported purchasing their own cigarettes. More than one third of children reported that no one had talked to them about smoking yet. Among all children 59.0% could name one or more cigarette brands. The most well-known brands were Marlboro and Petra. Petra was more recognized by girls than boys, providing evidence of the influence of gender specific industry marketing campaigns. Results from Prague and the Usti Region were very similar except water-pipe prevalence, children from the Usti Region reported more frequently that no one had talked to them about smoking yet (43.1%).

Conclusion: Our findings provide evidence that children age 8-12 years old experiment not only with cigarettes but also with other forms of smoking especially water pipe. Monitoring of smoking behaviour among children should include both cigarettes and other forms of smoking. Parents should be informed that relatives are main source of cigarettes for smoking initiation. Our findings provide evidence that tobacco control measures are insufficient in the Czech Republic and children are influenced by the tobacco industry. Evidence based tobacco reduction measures, including plain packaging, bans on advertising at point of sale, tougher control of illicit sales to minors and specialize tobacco licences for vendors are recommended.