Summary

HBSC Ireland 2006 has found that 15.3% of schoolchildren in Ireland report that they currently smoke; this represents a continuing decline from 1998 (21.2%). The percentage of smokers is higher among older children; 3.2% of boys and 1.7% of girls aged 10-11 years; and 22.8% of boys and 27.7% of girls aged 15-17 years. Those who smoke are less likely to report finding it easy to talk to their parents and living with both parents while they are more likely to report finding it easy to talk to their best friend, negative school perceptions, feeling pressured by schoolwork, having been bullied and spending more evenings out with their friends. Current smoking in this factsheet refers to children who report that they smoke at least monthly.

Why this topic?

Smoking is a leading cause of death globally and the largest cause of health inequalities in low income countries. Studies report that some Irish children perceive smoking as a right of passage and a societal norm. Children and adolescents who smoke cigarettes are more susceptible to respiratory problems, premature atherosclerosis and reduced physical fitness.

Trends 2002-2006

There has been a continuing reduction in the percentage of children who report that they are smokers from 18.6% in 2002 to 15.3% in 2006. This slight decrease is seen in both girls and boys and across all ages. The reduction is most marked among children aged 15-17 years (from 31.8% in 2002 to 25.1% in 2006).
...Smoking behaviour among schoolchildren in Ireland

Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 19th among 40 countries in Europe and North America, with 24% reporting that they currently smoke. Overall 2% of 11 year olds in Ireland (rank 26th) and 9% of 13 year olds in Ireland (rank 19th) report that they are current smokers.

International
Fifteen year old schoolchildren in Ireland (boys and girls together) are ranked 19th among 40 countries in Europe and North America, with 24% reporting that they currently smoke. Overall 2% of 11 year olds in Ireland (rank 26th) and 9% of 13 year olds in Ireland (rank 19th) report that they are current smokers.

Implications
Current smoking, as reported by schoolchildren in Ireland, has decreased over the years and in particular there has been a drop in the percentage of current smokers aged 15-17 years. Ireland ranks approximately mid-way among countries involved in HBSC 2006, with smoking rates higher in many eastern European countries compared to Ireland. These data suggest that good relationships with parents may play a protective role whereas peer relationships may increase the likelihood of smoking. Older girls in Ireland are more likely to smoke than boys which may warrant gender appropriate programmes to be developed both in terms of prevention of smoking initiation as well as smoking cessation.

References