



Youth Exposure to Tobacco in Movies in Ontario: 2017

Movies are a powerful vehicle for promoting tobacco use. A substantial body of scientific evidence indicates that exposure to smoking in movies is a cause of smoking initiation and progression to regular smoking among youth. Higher exposure to onscreen tobacco use increases the uptake of smoking among youth and undermines tobacco prevention efforts.

Since 2014, the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit has collaborated with the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies to monitor the exposure of Ontario youth to onscreen tobacco use, and estimated the impact of the exposure. Key findings from [last year's report](#) included:¹

Key Messages: Ontario's youth exposure to tobacco use in movies remains substantial. Requiring any movie that contains tobacco imagery be assigned an adult rating (18A) in Ontario could considerably decrease smoking initiation among youth.

- Of the top-grossing movies released in Ontario theatres from 2004 to 2016, 91% were youth-rated and 54% featured tobacco use. Of the movies with tobacco content, 86% were youth-rated in Ontario, a much higher share than in the US (53%). Eighty-four percent of tobacco incidentsⁱ were found in, and 85% of tobacco impressionsⁱⁱ were delivered by, movies youth-rated in Ontario, much higher than the percent found in US youth-rated movies (40% and 53% respectively)
- The Ontario Film Review Board (OFRB) has consistently provided inadequate information about smoking in movies:
 - Nearly nine of every ten (86%) youth-rated top-grossing movies with smoking did not include an OFRB “tobacco use” content advisor

ⁱ A tobacco incident is the use or implied use of a tobacco product (almost exclusively smoking) by an actor. Each screen appearance of tobacco within each scene is counted as one tobacco incident.

ⁱⁱ Tobacco impressions are estimated by multiplying the number of tobacco incidents in a movie by the paid admissions to that movie.

- About one of every three (36%) youth-rated top-grossing movies with smoking did not carry an OFRB “tobacco use” detailed observation
- Adult (18A) ratings for movies released in Ontario that depict onscreen tobacco use would save more than 30,000 lives and half a billion dollars in healthcare costs

The [2017 data for top-grossing movies released in Ontario theatres](#) is now available. A preview of the data indicates that it is consistent with the trend between 2004 and 2016, specifically:

- Of 132 top-grossing movies released in Ontario theatres in 2017, 90% were youth-rated and 10% percent were adult-rated (Table 1)
- More than half of the top-grossing movies (54%) in 2017 featured tobacco use (Table 1). Eight-five percent of the movies with tobacco content were youth-rated in Ontario, a much higher share than in the US (42%). Ontario youth had, therefore, substantially greater potential for exposure to smoking on screen than their US counterparts
- Top-grossing movies in 2017 contained a total of 2,911 tobacco incidents. Eighty-nine percent of tobacco incidents were found in movies youth-rated in Ontario, almost triple the percentage (30%) found in US youth-rated movies
- Top-grossing movies delivered an estimated 544.5 million in-theatre tobacco impressions to moviegoers in Ontario in 2017. Seventy-four percent of these tobacco impressions were delivered by youth-rated movies in Ontario whereas only 33% of 12.5 billion impressions in the US were delivered by youth-rated movies
- The Ontario Film Review Board's tobacco-related “detailed observations” (available online) and “content advisories” (online and on promotional material) provided inadequate information about smoking in movies: Nearly eight of every ten (83%) youth-rated top-grossing movies with smoking did not include an OFRB “tobacco use” content advisory, and about one of every five (20%) youth-rated top-grossing movies with smoking did not carry an OFRB “tobacco use” detailed observation

The Smoke-Free Ontario Scientific Advisory Committee notes that requiring any movie that contains tobacco imagery be assigned an adult rating (18A) in Ontario could substantially decrease smoking initiation among youth.² This policy measure has been recommended by public health stakeholders and institutions provincially, nationally and internationally.

Table 1: Number of Movies Released in the Domestic Market (Canada and US), by OFRB Rating and by Tobacco Imagery Status, 2004-2017

| Year ^a | Number of Domestic Movies by OFRB Rating | | | | Total | Tobacco Imagery | |
|-------------------|--|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|
| | G | PG | 14A | 18A/R* | | Yes | No |
| 2004 | 14 | 74 | 46 | 10 | 144 | 99 | 45 |
| 2005 | 24 | 67 | 40 | 12 | 143 | 97 | 46 |
| 2006 | 26 | 75 | 43 | 17 | 161 | 96 | 65 |
| 2007 | 17 | 58 | 59 | 23 | 157 | 106 | 51 |
| 2008 | 12 | 58 | 55 | 20 | 145 | 86 | 59 |
| 2009 | 10 | 61 | 60 | 13 | 144 | 70 | 74 |
| 2010 | 11 | 65 | 43 | 16 | 135 | 60 | 75 |
| 2011 | 20 | 64 | 40 | 10 | 134 | 62 | 72 |
| 2012 | 11 | 56 | 55 | 14 | 136 | 69 | 67 |
| 2013 | 11 | 55 | 59 | 10 | 135 | 73 | 62 |
| 2014 | 11 | 66 | 45 | 8 | 130 | 59 | 71 |
| 2015 | 12 | 54 | 58 | 8 | 132 | 68 | 64 |
| 2016 | 9 | 60 | 54 | 10 | 133 | 51 | 82 |
| 2017 | 13 | 42 | 64 | 13 | 132 | 71 | 61 |
| Total | 201 | 855 | 721 | 184 | 1961 | 1067 | 894 |
| % of Total | 10% | 44% | 37% | 9% | 100 | 54% | 46% |

^a Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

*R-rated movies: one in each 2006, 2015 and 2016.

References

¹ Luk R and Schwartz R. *Youth Exposure to Tobacco in Movies in Ontario, Canada: 2004-2016*. OTRU Special Report. Toronto, ON: Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, July 2017.

² Smoke-Free Ontario Scientific Advisory Committee, Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). *Evidence to Guide Action: Comprehensive Tobacco Control in Ontario (2016)*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2017.