

Teens pick up on movie smoking

**Study: Turn them off
with anti-tobacco ads**

By Karen S. Peterson
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Teens come away with positive messages about cigarettes if they see a movie whose stars smoke, new research shows. But it also suggests a 30-second anti-smoking message before the film can "inoculate" teens against the idea that smoking is exciting and fun.

"Smokers (in movies) are frequently the lead characters and are likable, attractive and successful," says researcher Connie Pechmann, University of California, Irvine.

But her study of 800 non-smoking, middle-class ninth-graders suggests "if teens see the anti-smoking message first, they are inoculated."

Tom Lauria of The Tobacco Institute is skeptical. "Kids do not necessarily smoke because they see it in movies," he says.

Pechmann's team conducted two controlled experiments for the study, funded by the state of California. In the first, students were shown excerpts from *Reality Bites* and *Wild at Heart*. One group saw scenes with smoking; others saw scenes without it.

Using standardized tests, her team determined "exposure to just one minute of smoking by young movie stars" enhanced teens' perceptions of smokers.

In the second experiment, teens watched a full version of *Reality Bites* in which Winona Ryder and Ethan Hawke smoke. Ahead of time, some saw a 30-second, anti-smoking message supplied by the state.

Teen viewers who did not see that ad felt the self-images of smokers and their social acceptability were improved. Those who did see it did not retain the idea that smoking is "cool," she says. She recommends ads be placed before all movies geared to teens.

Counters Lauria: "Teens go into movie theaters armed with more information about smoking than any generation on earth. If these people think they can change a teen's attitude in 30 seconds, they are the first ones on earth who could."