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TOBACCO CONTROL

Smokers clock up almost 8 additional days of sick leave every year

[Does smoking increase sick leave? Evidence using register data on Swedish workers Tobacco Control 2007; 16: 114-8]

Smokers take an average of almost eight days more of sick leave every year than their non-smoking colleagues, suggested research published in Tobacco Control .

The research team analysed nationally representative registry data on sickness absence among more than 14,000 workers in Sweden between 1988 and 1991.

Of the sample included in the study, 45% had never smoked. Of the remainder, 29% were current smokers and 26% former smokers.

Non-smokers took the fewest days off sick; smokers took the most. Across the whole sample, the average number of days taken as sick leave was 25.

But smokers took almost 11 extra days off sick compared with their non-smoking colleagues, equal to 43% of all sick leave taken every year among the sample, say the authors.

There was little difference in the number of additional days taken as sick leave between male and female workers.

Adjusting for the fact that smokers tend to choose "riskier" jobs and have poorer underlying health, as well as socioeconomic factors, brought the difference in the number of days taken as sick leave to just below eight.

Factors other than ill health directly caused by smoking may account for much of the time taken off in sick leave, suggest the authors.

The authors accept that sick leave rates in Sweden are among some of the highest in Europe, but say that their findings nevertheless point to smoking as having a significant impact on productivity.