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Adolescent Depression and High Receptivity to Tobacco Ads May Lead to Teen Smoking

## For Release March 27, 2002

A NIDA-funded study by researchers at the Georgetown University School of Medicine and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine reports that adolescent depression, combined with high receptivity to tobacco advertising, plays a powerful role in whether a teen smokes cigarettes.

While research has demonstrated the effects of a number of factors on adolescent smoking behavior (including exposure to smoking by family and friends, high receptivity to tobacco advertising, and positive attitudes and beliefs about smoking), this is one of the first studies to examine how depression combines with these factors to influence the likelihood of smoking.

The study, entitled "Interacting Effects of Depression and Tobacco Advertising Receptivity on Adolescent Smoking," is published in the March 2002 issue of the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*.

"This study demonstrates the complex interplay of factors that influence the initiation of smoking by youth and identifies subgroups of adolescents at especially high risk, such as those who are depressed and those with a high level of receptivity to tobacco advertising. These findings will be useful in targeting prevention messages," said NIDA Acting Director Dr. Glen Hanson.

The senior author of the study, Dr. Janet Audrain of the University of Pennsylvania, said, "adolescents with elevated levels of depression may find the messages delivered by tobacco advertisements more appealing than adolescents without elevated levels of depression. Smoking prevention messages should educate youth about the tobacco industry's manipulation of youth that may be psychologically vulnerable to smoke, and dispel the myths about the benefits of smoking and the images that these advertisements portray (for example, cigarette smoking is associated with happiness and good times)." Dr. Audrain and the research team surveyed 1,123 high school freshmen as part of a longitudinal investigation of the biobehavioral predictors of adolescent smoking. Students completed a survey that assessed current smoking practices, exposure to other smokers, including family and peers, self-reported levels of depression and receptivity to tobacco advertising.

Sixty percent of the freshmen reported that they had never smoked (never tried or experimented with smoking), and 40 percent reported having smoked at least a partial or whole cigarette. Across both groups 34 percent had high receptivity (ability to name an often-advertised cigarette brand, had a favorite tobacco ad, and reported that they possessed or were willing to use a tobacco industry product) to tobacco advertising.

Researchers found that, overall, more adolescents with high receptivity to tobacco advertising had smoked, as compared to those with low receptivity, and these results were further affected by depression.

"Among participants with clinically significant depression scores, the effects of tobacco advertising receptivity were heightened," said Kenneth P. Tercyak, Ph.D. of Georgetown University, study co-investigator, and the article's lead author. "These adolescents may be less likely to successfully say 'no' when presented with the opportunity to receive and try promotional products and are more

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attracted to and influenced by the promises portrayed in tobacco ads." For more information about the Penn/Georgetown Transdisciplinary Tobacco Use Research Center, go to <http://www.uphs.upenn.edu/tturb>.

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