

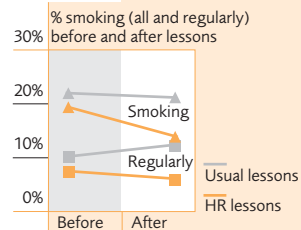
Compared to other lessons, school programmes aiming to improve social and decision-making skills have been most consistently successful in preventing smoking, but this may have been because they have not been compared against programmes which include harm reduction objectives.

This possibility is suggested by a study in Western Australia which randomly assigned 30 secondary schools to normal lessons on smoking or to a new harm reduction curriculum. Whilst this embraced abstinence, it also tried to make itself relevant to all the pupils (half had already smoked) by helping smokers stop or cut down. Delivered in health education classes by the school's own teachers, it consisted of eight lessons over two years. School nurses too were trained to counsel pupils who wanted to stop or cut down.

Before the lessons baseline measures were taken from 4636 pupils mostly aged 13–14. By the end of the following year when the lessons had been completed, 21% in usual-lesson schools were currently smoking (past month) and 12% were smoking regularly (four+ days in the past week). With the new programme, the figures were 14% and 6% [chart](#). Taking into account differences between the pupils, those in usual-lesson schools were twice as likely to end up as regular smokers and also more likely to currently smoke. On both measures, small gaps between the two sets of pupils before the lessons had substantially widened.

The programme's achievements are the more impressive since in this case 'usual lessons' were an innovative new skills-based curriculum in which teachers had been freshly trained. The main question mark over the findings is that nearly half the pupils could not be reassessed at the last follow-up. Steps were taken to adjust for this and to check whether it affected the outcomes, but it seems likely that if it did, it would have worked against the new approach. Harm reduction approaches to alcohol have also been trialed in Australia and in relation to both smoking and drinking in the USA, recording prevention and harm reduction effects exceeding those of normal lessons [Links](#).

Hamilton G. *et al.* "A school-based harm minimization smoking intervention trial: outcome results." *Addiction*. 2005, 100, p. 689–700.



**LINKS** Nuggets 10.11 2.13  
Nuggette 7, issue 12