

## **Asthmatic teens even more likely to vape than those without the illness**

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(HealthDay)— Perhaps assuming that e-cigarettes are "safer" than

tobacco, teens with asthma now vape at higher rates than those without the respiratory condition, new research shows.

However, "the use of products containing nicotine in any form among youths—including electronic cigarettes—is unsafe," said study author Keshia Reid, a senior environmental epidemiologist at the Florida Department of Health in Tallahassee.

In the new study, e-cigarettes were the preferred nicotine source for Florida students with asthma. Nearly 8 percent of middle schoolers, and nearly 20 percent of [high school students](#), used them, the researcher found.

That's compared with about 6 percent of [middle school students](#) and 17 percent of high [school](#) students who did not have asthma, Reid's team noted.

Why would any young person with a respiratory ailment like asthma inhale e-cigarette vapor? Tobacco control expert Patricia Folan had one theory.

"The high rate of [e-cigarette](#) use, or vaping, seen in youth with and without asthma may be related to the perception among many teens and adults that these products are safe," said Folan, who directs the Center for Tobacco Control at Northwell Health in Great Neck, N.Y. She wasn't involved in the new study.

But according to Folan, "some studies show that vaping products can exacerbate [asthma symptoms](#), cause damage to the lungs due to the flavorings and other chemical ingredients, and result in nicotine addiction."

The data for the report were collected by the Florida Department of

Health using the 2016 Florida Youth Tobacco Survey.

According to the survey, 11 percent of middle school and 28 percent of high school students with asthma, and 8 percent of [middle school](#) and 24 percent of high school students without asthma, said they used some sort of nicotine product.

Why children with asthma would use products that make asthma worse is not clearly understood. However, Reid's team speculated that smoking may be one way to help these kids cope with social anxiety.

Kids who don't take their [asthma medications](#) also tend to be more rebellious and risk-taking when it comes to their health, the researchers noted. So, adopting a vaping or smoking habit may be part of that "rebellion."

Finally, some asthmatic teens may view vaping as more socially acceptable and/or less harmful than cigarettes.

But another expert warned that inhaling *any* type of nicotine-laden fumes does your lungs no favors.

"Smoking is bad for kids with asthma; it's bad for anyone with asthma," said Dr. Norman Edelman, a senior scientific advisor to the American Lung Association. And because the vapor from e-cigarettes also irritates the airways, "I would be very surprised if vaping didn't [also] make asthma worse," he said.

Edelman believes today's kids are drawn to e-cigarettes because they're "in." Also, he believes many teens with [asthma](#) simply don't want to be seen as different—they want to fit in, and smoking or vaping may be ways to gain social acceptance.

But whatever the reason driving the trend, "we have to redouble our efforts to make teenagers free of tobacco and e-cigarettes," Edelman said.

"It should be illegal to buy them, and flavors added to them should be banned," he believes. "There should be no wiggle room to keep cigarettes, e-cigarettes and vape away from children."

The report was published June 1 in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.*, a publication of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**More information:** Keshia Reid, Ph.D., senior environmental epidemiologist, Florida Department of Health, Tallahassee; Norman Edelman, M.D., senior scientific advisor, American Lung Association; Patricia Folan, DNP, director, Center for Tobacco Control, Northwell Health, Great Neck, N.Y.; June 1, 2018, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*

For more information on asthma and teens, visit the [American Lung Association](#).

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