

Call for tougher age restrictions on YouTube cannabis vaping videos

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YouTube videos showing cannabis vaping as fun and joyful are widely available and easily accessible to young people, a study led by University of Queensland researchers has found.

The videos studied showed elements of risk-taking behavior including [vaping](#) a whole cartridge of THC—the main psychoactive compound in cannabis—in a single setting, and 52 percent of videos had no age access restrictions.

Lead author Ph.D. student Carmen Lim from UQ's National Centre for Youth Substance Use Research said the volume and accessibility of YouTube videos promoting cannabis vaping was concerning.

"There's been an increase in the potency of cannabis over the last two decades, and more recently, there has been a significant rise in the number of [young people](#) who are vaping cannabis," Miss Lim said.

"Unrestricted access to the large volume of YouTube videos portraying cannabis vaping as fun and joyful could increase uptake among adolescents."

In the United States, recent studies showed that one in ten adolescents in high school had vaped cannabis.

The UQ research team searched for cannabis vaping videos on YouTube between 2016 and 2020 and categorized these into prominent themes—advertisement, product review, celebratory, reflective, how-to, and warning.

Metrics around the number of views, likes, dislikes, and comments for each [video](#) were recorded.

Co-lead author Dr. Gary Chan from UQ's National Centre for Youth Substance Use Research said many of the YouTube videos on vaping cannabis had no age restrictions, meaning children and adolescents could easily access them.

"Only around 25 percent of cannabis vaping-related videos communicate the potential harms of cannabis vaping," Dr. Chan said.

"The videos with a 'how-to' theme were viewed more than five million times and videos with a 'celebratory' theme, expressing the fun and joy of cannabis vaping, were viewed more than seven million times.

"As YouTube has become a popular source of accessing cannabis-related information, we need to reduce the accessibility of cannabis-related content to adolescents."

This is the first study to examine the availability of cannabis vaping videos on YouTube since cannabis became legal in many jurisdictions in North America.

The researchers hope the study results are used to inform a future [regulatory framework](#) on YouTube and other [social media platforms](#) around mandating age restrictions on videos promoting [cannabis](#) use.

This research is published in *Addiction*.

More information: Content analysis of cannabis vaping videos on YouTube. *Addiction*. doi.org/10.1111/add.15424

Provided by University of Queensland

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