

Vaping with nicotine more common than smoking among NZ teens

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More than a third of New Zealand high school students have tried vaping, with 10 percent vaping regularly and six percent vaping weekly or more often, researchers have found.

About 80 percent of those who reported [vaping](#) regularly and 90 percent

of those who vaped weekly or more often sometimes or always used e-cigarettes containing [nicotine](#).

Students often began experimenting with vaping at a young age, with 22 percent of Year 9 students (13- and 14-year-olds) saying they had tried vaping.

The study is based on data from the Youth19 survey of secondary school students aged 13 to 18 in the Auckland, Northland, and Waikato education regions conducted in 2019. It reflects the situation before the Government banned the sale of vaping products to under 18-year-olds and prohibited e-cigarette marketing late last year.

Researcher Dr. Jude Ball, from the University of Otago, Wellington, says the study highlights the importance of getting the balance right between making it easy for adult smokers to switch to less harmful vaping, while protecting young non-smokers.

"Our findings suggest that during 2018 and 2019, that balance was not achieved."

Dr. Ball says the survey found vaping to be two to three times more common than smoking among students, and was common among demographic groups unlikely to smoke. Two-thirds of those who had tried vaping, and nearly half of regular vapers, had never smoked.

"Nationally, this would translate to 15,000 regular vapers and 6,700 weekly vapers in the New Zealand secondary school population who have never smoked."

Dr. Ball says vaping among adolescents has increased sharply since the introduction of nicotine-containing 'pod' devices, such as JUUL and Vuse, to the New Zealand market in 2018.

Many pod devices use 'nicotine salt' technology, which delivers nicotine more efficiently into the bloodstream, and enables high nicotine concentrations without causing a harsh sensation in the mouth and throat.

"Our finding that 80 percent of students who vape regularly are using nicotine is in contrast to a 2018 study which showed only 23 percent of 14- and 15-year-old vapers had used nicotine the last time they vaped.

"It is also concerning that 17 percent of those who had tried vaping, did not know whether they had used nicotine or not."

Dr. Ball says while vaping carries lower health risks than smoking, it is not harmless.

"Recent reports have highlighted the risk of acute lung injury in vapers, as well as chronic risks to cardiovascular, respiratory and oral health.

"Since e-cigarettes have only been widely available for about 10 years and respiratory illnesses caused by exposure to toxic substances may only show up decades later, the impacts of long term use are still unknown."

Dr. Ball says the research underlines the need for mandatory on-pack health warnings and education campaigns targeting youth.

"Our findings show that vaping of nicotine has emerged as a new public health risk to adolescents, the vast majority of whom would otherwise be nicotine-free and smokefree. Thousands are now being exposed to vaping harms and potential nicotine addiction."

Fellow researcher Associate Professor Terryann Clark (Ngāpuhi), from the University of Auckland, welcomes new Government proposals to invest in social marketing campaigns aimed at supporting [young people](#)

to stay smokefree and vape-free.

"Our findings suggest that prevention campaigns will need to focus on much younger students, with one in five students having already tried vaping by the age of 14."

She notes more needs to be done to enforce new laws brought in last year to restrict marketing and ban sales of vaping products to those under 18.

"Online marketing continues to target young people with competitions and promotions despite the law change, and we are aware of retailers who are still selling vaping products to young people under 18. What we're hearing from schools is that prevalence of vaping has gone up, not down, since 2019."

The study is the first to investigate vaping among all ages of [high school students](#).

More information: Jude Ball et al, New Zealand Youth19 survey: vaping has wider appeal than smoking in secondary school students, and most use nicotine-containing e-cigarettes *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1753-6405.13169

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