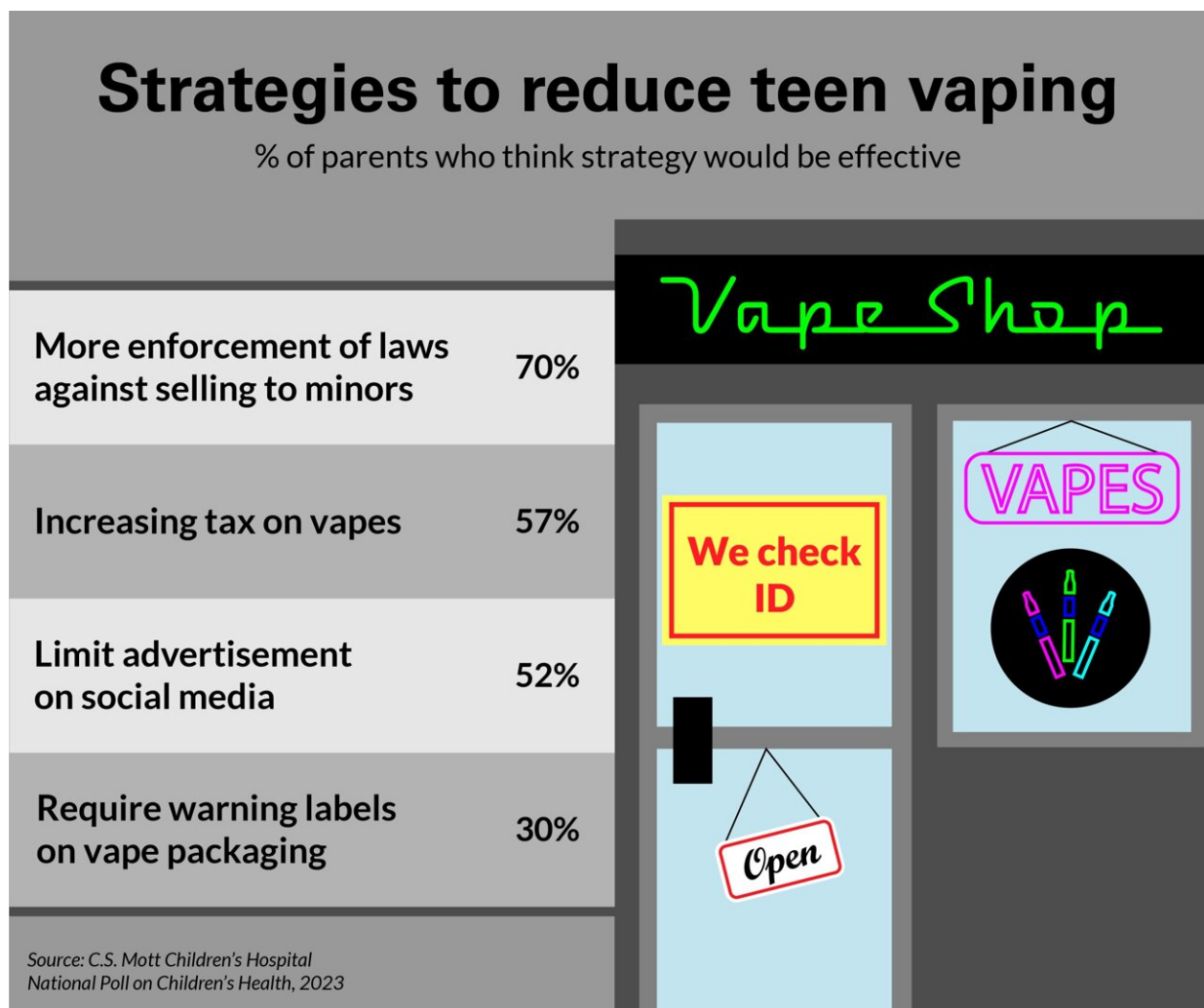


Unrealistic vaping views? Nearly 50 percent of parents confident they'd know if their child vapes

March 20 2023



What parents say about strategies to reduce teen vaping. Credit: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at University of Michigan

Health

Nearly half of parents say they would definitely know if their child was vaping, despite characteristics of vaping devices that make it easy to hide or disguise their use, a new national poll suggests.

Four in five [parents](#) also think their adolescent or teen understands the health risks of vaping with few believing their [child](#) has tried it, [according to](#) the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at University of Michigan Health.

"Very few parents believe their child is vaping, but they may not have a realistic view about their child's exposure or experiences with e-cigarettes," said Mott Poll co-director Sarah Clark, M.P.H.

"Most parents recognize the health risks of vaping and feel their child does too," she added. "However, it's important for parents to understand that the part of the brain that connects emotions to judgement is still developing for adolescents and teens and they may not consider long-term health effects in their daily actions."

The nationally representative report is based on responses from 1,325 parents with at least one child ages 11-18 polled in February 2023.

Vaping has proliferated over the past decade, with hundreds of brands available on the market. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Youth Tobacco Survey found that in 2022 about 3% of middle schoolers and 14% of [high school students](#) said they'd vaped in the past 30 days.

Most parents are positive they would definitely or probably know if their

child vaped from their kids telling them (67%), finding vaping supplies in their child's things (57%), detecting it by smell (48%) or finding out from other people (37%).

"Based on national data about vaping prevalence among middle and high schoolers, many parents may be unaware that their child has tried it," Clark said. "Devices can look like common objects that parents might not immediately recognize. Disposable vapes are becoming more popular and can be thrown away before teens are around parents or teachers. Vaping doesn't have the telltale odor of traditional cigarettes. All this makes vaping harder to detect and easier to hide than some parents may realize."

Five percent of parents polled say they currently vape themselves—and they're more likely to say their child vapes as well. Another 18% of parents have vaped in the past.

Vaping is difficult to detect because it doesn't have an obvious smell and devices have become increasingly discreet and easy to conceal. Vape products may resemble everyday items like USB drives, pens, smartphone cases and smart watches.

Even clothing items and backpacks have been designed to disguise vaping, including hoodies that hide a vaping device in the drawstring. Disposable vapes are easy to use and easy to purchase at a variety of locations and are thrown away once the cartridge is empty.

Parents disagree about vaping consequences

It's not just difficult for parents to recognize vaping but it can also be concealable from teachers even in indoor areas like bathrooms and classrooms.

But parents are split on how to enforce consequences for children caught vaping at school, with half supporting suspension from school or activities and others favoring less severe consequences like detention, a warning or even no punishment at all.

Parents overall are less likely to support legal consequences. A little less than a third of parents say an appropriate punishment would be community service or counseling for kids caught vaping in public while one in five say a warning would suffice.

Very few parents support fines or probation and nearly one in 10 do not support any punishment.

"Although parents generally felt adolescents should be held responsible if they are caught vaping, they disagreed about the severity of consequences they would support," Clark said.

"This variability in parent opinions may make it difficult for school and community officials to enact vaping policies that include clear and consistent consequences."

Overall, more than two in three parents believe the children themselves should be held responsible if they are caught vaping while a little over half say the seller of the vapes should face consequences and two in five say parents should take the blame.

Nearly three-quarters of parents also say heavier enforcement of laws against selling vapes to minors is likely to reduce vaping among children and teens. Other parents see alternative strategies as being effective, including increasing the tax on vapes (57%), limiting vape advertising on [social media](#) (52%), or requiring warning labels on vape product packaging (30%).

E-cigarettes were originally marketed as a healthier alternative to traditional cigarettes. While the majority of parents believe vaping is addictive, 16% of parents would rather their child vape than drink alcohol or use drugs, while 10% think vaping is not as bad for long-term health as smoking traditional cigarettes.

"Vaping can be dangerous for teens because they are using nicotine and that can become addictive and damaging to their health," Clark said.

"Whether or not you think your child is vaping or whether they understand health risks, it's helpful to initiate conversations to talk to them about it."

She notes that vaping carries health risks such as chronic bronchitis, exacerbation of asthma, and swelling and irritation of the lungs due to the inhaled particles. Over time, vaping can also cause significant lung damage. Addiction to nicotine is also a health problem and trying to stop is difficult and can lead to symptoms of withdrawal.

Additional risks can occur when adolescents put different substances in the vaping device, including marijuana and other drugs.

Clark offers parents top tips for identifying vaping and encouraging healthy choices among adolescents and teens:

Talk to your child

The top way parents thought they would know about their child vaping is that the child would tell them. This means parents need to ask questions to find out what their child knows about e-cigarettes, Clark says, whether they have tried vaping, and whether their friends or classmates are vaping.

Try to ask open-ended questions and listen before reacting.

"This should be an ongoing conversation allowing parents to gauge their child's knowledge and experiences with vaping, talk about [health risks](#) and give kids opportunities to share information and ask questions," Clark said.

"In a non-judgmental way, parents can explain why they think vaping is unhealthy. If their child is vaping, parents should work with their child to learn about strategies to quit, consulting the child's health care provider if necessary."

Identify vaping products

Companies are selling various vaping products online designed to look like everyday items, making it easy to hide them in plain sight.

These include USB drives, pens, phone cases and smartwatches. Hooded sweatshirts designed with tubed drawstrings allow people to inhale through these discretely as well as vaping backpacks. Some vaping devices require [rechargeable batteries](#) so be aware of unfamiliar batteries or battery charging devices.

Parents may want to visit gas stations or [convenience stores](#) to look at the variety of disposal vapes so they can learn more about the packaging and cost.

Understand risk level

Parents should seek to learn whether vaping is common in their community, Clark says, by talking to school officials about how the school identifies and enforces policies about vaping. Parents also may want to ask whether vaping is covered in health education classes, and whether the school could offer education for parents.

Families may also want to talk to other parents in the community or of children's friends about whether they are noticing possible signs of vaping, such as finding vaping supplies or noticing young people smoking in the community.

"Parents should try to understand their child's risk of exposure to vaping among friend circles and in the community and also how their schools enforce vaping rules," Clark said.

Recognize possible signs of excessive vaping

Vaping for an extended amount of time can lead to visible signs. Because of a chemical in the e-liquid called propylene glycol, vaping can cause dry mouth or dehydration, which may lead to increased thirst and dark under-eye circles. The same ingredient can reduce moisture inside the nose and cause nosebleeds.

Irritants from the vapors can trigger the immune system, which may react with mouth sores and coughing.

"In order to help your kids, you need to educate yourself about how [vaping](#) works and how to detect it," Clark said.

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Unrealistic vaping views? Nearly 50 percent of parents confident they'd know if their child vapes (2023, March 20) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-03-unrealistic-vaping-views-percent-parents.html>

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