

Awareness of vaping risks key to reducing e-cigarette use among young people

August 7 2023



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The 15- to 30-year-olds in the U.K. who perceived e-cigarettes as harmful were 40% less likely to use them compared to those who do not consider them harmful. Yet only 53% of those using e-cigarettes at least

monthly said they had seen warning labels on packaging, finds research from The George Institute for Global Health.

The findings, published today in the *Journal of Public Health*, are based on a survey of more than 1,000 individuals that was designed to better understand the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs around [e-cigarettes](#) (electronic cigarettes, also known as "vapes") among this age group, particularly in the context of their rising use. In 2021, [it was estimated](#) that four million people aged 16 years and over currently used e-cigarettes daily or occasionally in the U.K.

About one in five respondents reported currently using e-cigarettes at least monthly (with 90% having used ones containing nicotine), and one in ten used them every day. The most common reason for using e-cigarettes was because a friend used them, with 23% of participants who used e-cigarettes at least monthly saying they have three close friends who use e-cigarettes.

While these findings may not be generalizable to the entire age group, they may be indicative of the attitudes of e-cigarette users. Dr. Ana-Catarina Pinho-Gomes, Honorary Research Fellow at The George Institute, U.K. who led the research said, "Our findings suggest that peer behavior is a key driver of e-cigarette use, while awareness of the harms of vaping is a deterrent. Awareness-raising campaigns aimed at [young people](#) (such as at schools and college) and on [social media](#) are needed to highlight the known risks of e-cigarette use, as well as uncertainty over their long-term health impacts."

In addition to [health risks](#), discarded e-cigarettes carry environmental harms, generating considerable amounts of plastic and electronic waste. Three out of four 15- to 19-year-old vapers surveyed used disposable e-cigarettes, which are often cheaper than the refillable alternative. This reflects a widely reported upward trend in the use of disposable devices

among teenagers.

The survey builds on an [international study](#) on e-cigarette susceptibility involving 4,007 young people, which revealed almost two-thirds of 15- to 30-year-olds in the U.K. who have never used e-cigarettes may be susceptible to taking up vaping in the future, and around the same amount had been exposed to e-cigarette advertising. By using colorful packaging, fruity flavors, and cheap disposable vapes, the [e-cigarette](#) industry has created products that are designed to appeal to young people.

Dr. Pinho-Gomes concluded, "The U.K. Government must build on these findings by raising awareness of the potential harms of vaping, both to [health](#) and the environment, through public education campaigns and through tighter regulation around packaging and labeling.

"Although e-cigarettes may help with smoking cessation, their use by non-smokers, particularly young people, should be strongly discouraged. Until further evidence is available on their long-term consequences, a precautionary approach is advisable and the U.K. government should consider the cautious approach to their regulation adopted by other countries, such as Australia."

More information: Ana-Catarina Pinho-Gomes et al, E-cigarette attitudes and behaviours amongst 15-30-year-olds in the UK, *Journal of Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/pubmed/fdad138](https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdad138)

Provided by George Institute for Global Health

Citation: Awareness of vaping risks key to reducing e-cigarette use among young people (2023, August 7) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-08-awareness->

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