

One in four regional Australian teens using vapes: Study

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Over a quarter of people aged 14–17 have used e-cigarettes ("vaped") and one in 10 have done so within the last 30 days, according to a new study published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Of those surveyed, 20% had vaped within the past year, and rates were similar across regional and [metropolitan areas](#).

The study was led by Dr. Lauren Gardner from the Matilda Center for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, who says the findings are concerning for a number of reasons.

"We found the average age of first use to be just 14 years old," says Dr. Gardner.

"This is problematic as we know that vaping can cause significant harms and that nicotine has the potential to impact healthy brain development."

The researchers surveyed 4,200 students in 70 schools in New South Wales, Queensland, and Western Australia to capture the vaping habits of a diverse range of Australian teenagers. The self-reported data shows that students in regional areas use e-cigarettes around the same amount as [young people](#) in metropolitan areas.

Professor of Rural Health Megan Passey, who was not involved in the study, says she is not surprised by the lack of city–country divide.

"That vaping rates are similarly high in regional and [remote areas](#) does not surprise me but is concerning. Given the very limited access to tobacco and nicotine treatment services in regional communities, we have to address this [vaping](#) problem urgently. Ideally, research to identify the best ways to action change will be undertaken with and by regional communities and young people," explains Professor Passey from the Daffodil Center, a [joint venture](#) between the Cancer Council NSW and the University of Sydney.

Dr. Gardner agrees, adding that while young people have benefited from smoking prevention and cessation resources, access is more limited in

the regions so use of traditional cigarettes remains higher.

"Vaping is clearly a pervasive issue that does not discriminate by geographic location. We are also seeing this trend from teachers across Australia reaching out to us for support and resources," says Dr. Gardner.

"Research often focuses on young people in major cities, but we need to ensure young people from regional and remote areas are represented too."

"We don't want to see e-cigarette use follow the same trend as [tobacco smoking](#). We want young people to be both smoke- and vape-free, so it's critical that public health initiatives target health inequities and support young people in regional towns and cities."

More information: Lauren A Gardner et al, Prevalence, patterns of use, and socio-demographic features of e-cigarette use by Australian adolescents: a survey, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2023). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.52075](#)

Provided by University of Sydney

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