

New Zealand researchers find more vape stores in deprived areas and near schools

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New University of Canterbury research has found vape stores are proliferating in Aotearoa New Zealand's most deprived communities—with many also located near schools.

Large inequities in access to vaping products are highlighted in the investigation, with far more vape stores in New Zealand's most deprived neighborhoods compared to less deprived communities.

Published in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Social Science & Medicine*, the new [study](#) also finds almost 30% of New Zealand's vape stores are within 400 meters of a [school](#) and 71% are within 800 meters.

"To be honest, I have been surprised by just how many vape stores are near schools and to see the magnitude of difference between numbers of vape stores in the most deprived and least deprived communities," says senior author Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha | University of Canterbury (UC) public health expert Dr. Matt Hobbs.

"We can also see that the number of these stores in the least deprived areas are hardly going up at all over time, whereas they are increasing rapidly in the most deprived areas that also tend to have a larger proportion of Māori, Pasifika and Asian residents. The gap between more affluent and more deprived areas is getting bigger over time."

Discussions between Dr. Hobbs and Whānau Whanake sparked the research, he says.

"We were working on a project looking at air pollution impacts on health, but it was increasingly apparent that vaping and the rise of vaping among young people was important," says Dr. Hobbs, Co-Director of the GeoHealth Laboratory in the Geospatial Research Institute at UC.

"We decided to take a closer look at how this has developed over time and where the vape stores are."

Dr. Hobbs, with UC postdoctoral fellow Dr. Lukas Marek at the Geospatial Research Institute, supervised UC student Isaac Waterman to

help identify the prevalence and spatial distribution of vape stores nationwide.

"It is very rare for an [undergraduate student](#) to do something like this. He was funded for 12 weeks of research and did a phenomenal job," Dr. Hobbs says.

Various sources—including the Specialist Vape Retailer register, the New Zealand Deprivation index, and census data—were combined to pinpoint vape store locations and to explore the connection with deprivation and youth vaping.

As well as the journal article, key findings are presented online through UC's GeoHealth Laboratory. Breaking Through the Cloud: Vaping in Aotearoa New Zealand provides interactive data that policymakers, schools, health organizations and [community groups](#) can access.

"People can zoom into their school or neighborhood and see how many vape stores there are in the vicinity."

New regulations aimed at limiting youth vaping were announced last August, including no new specialist vape shops within 300 meters of schools and marae.

Describing their findings as just one piece of a big jigsaw, Dr. Hobbs says there is much more research yet to be done. "What we hope to do next is explore the link between exposure to vape products and the outcome of young people actually [vaping](#)."

More information: . I. Waterman et al, Investigating the spatial and temporal variation of vape retailer provision in New Zealand: A cross-

sectional and nationwide study, *Social Science & Medicine* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.116848](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.116848)

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