

Strong emotions, intense cravings and daily disruption: Young people's experiences of vaping

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Young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are struggling with the effects of vaping addiction, with physical and mental cravings disrupting their

school and work routines, researchers at the University of Otago have found.

The researchers interviewed 22 young people between the ages of 16 and 20 based in the Dunedin or Christchurch areas to ask about their experiences with [vaping](#). The results of the study are [published](#) in *Drug and Alcohol Review*.

The co-leader of the study, Anna Graham-DeMello, a Research Fellow with the ASPIRE Aotearoa Research Center at the University of Otago, Wellington, says the young people spoke of vaping dominating their thoughts throughout the day. Some reported vaping continuously in long bouts and losing track of how frequently they were vaping.

"The young people we talked to reported disruption to their [daily routines](#), especially at school, as they succumbed to cravings and looked for opportunities to vape, whether in classrooms, bathrooms, vehicles or outdoors. They created excuses to leave their classes as they felt driven to vape.

"Many of the study participants became irritable, uncomfortable, moody or angry if they had to delay vaping. They expressed these emotions in different ways, and would sometimes shut down and not want to interact with others."

All the participants in the study described themselves as being addicted to vaping. Most recounted a rapid transition from vaping socially to feeling addicted—typically within just a few weeks.

"Once they had obtained a device of their own (and no longer relied exclusively on others sharing vapes with them), their level of vaping increased rapidly and many quickly felt out of control."

The commonplace nature of vaping in [social settings](#) encourages ongoing and more frequent use of vapes by young people, DeMello says.

"Participants told us they see vaping everywhere they go, and that, unlike smoking, their friends and peers are usually not judgmental about it."

Of the 15- to 17-year-olds in Aotearoa, 15% report vaping every day; as do 25% of 18- to 24-year-olds. Māori are 2.5 times more likely to vape than non-Māori.

Professor Janet Hoek, co-director of the ASPIRE Aotearoa Research Center and senior author comments, "We know that although young people initially enjoy the flavors and social bonding vaping offers, addiction brings profound regret and undermines their well-being. We urgently need stronger policy measures that protect young people from the aggressive marketing that continues to target them."

DeMello says the speed with which those interviewed became addicted and the disruption and distress to their lives demonstrates the need to reduce the widespread availability, affordability and appeal of vapes.

"Targeted health promotion campaigns aimed specifically at young people which feature personal testimonies could deter vaping uptake. We also need vaping cessation programs that are specifically tailored to youth."

The research team say the Government should consider ending the sale of vaping products in retailers, such as dairies; capping overall retailer numbers to lower the density of stores selling vapes; stopping any vape store from operating within 500 meters of schools and marae; and preventing retailers from discounting vapes or using loyalty programs.

They also say close monitoring will be needed if the government

proceeds with its plan to end the sale of disposable vapes, given how quickly vaping companies create new technologies that undermine the intention of the law.

More information: Anna Graham-DeMello et al, Young people's experiences of addiction to nicotine vaping products: A qualitative analysis from Aotearoa New Zealand, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.13902](https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13902)

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