



Evidence: Young People and Vaping

Patterns and prevalence of vaping in young people

The most recent National survey monitoring vape use in young people is the NHS 2023 Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England Survey¹. This survey includes 11–15-year-olds and is conducted on average every 2 years. According to the latest survey most young people *do not* vape, only 9% reported *current* vaping, the same as in 2021¹. Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) run annual surveys (conducted by YouGov) which also monitor the use of nicotine vapes by young people, but in the wider age range of 11–17-year-olds. In their most recent survey in 2024² 18% reported ever using a vape, 10% reported trying a vape once or twice, 7% reported currently using a vape: 4% were regular users, 3% were occasional users (less than once a week), and 1.3% reported no longer vaping.

Vape use by Gender

Vape use is reported to be slightly higher in girls than boys. In the 2023 Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England Survey of 11–15-year-olds¹, 11% of girls reported current use compared with 7% in boys. Six percent of girls reported regular use compared with 4% of boys. 5% of girls reported occasional use compared with 3% of boys, 27% versus 22% respectively for ‘ever’ using a vape, and 4% versus 3% for someone who used to vape. Rates of vape use in girls only exceeded those of boys in 2021, before then (between 2014–2018 boys reported higher use than girls)¹. The 2023 survey year was the first year to ask about ‘another gender’ identity. Those young people identifying as ‘another gender’ reported much higher rates of vape use compared to all other genders, with current use reported as 17%, regular use at 11%, occasional use 6%, ex-use at 6% and ever tried at 35%. Regular vape use of more than 1 year was also higher in those gender category (64%), and use in boys (62%) higher than in girls (60%).¹

Vape use by Age

Reported *ever* use and *current* use of nicotine vapes increases with age. In the same 2023 survey¹, 14% of 11–15-year-olds reported ever use, 28% in 16–17-year-olds, and 24% in 18-year-olds. A similar pattern is seen for current vape use, with 4.6% of 11–15-year-olds reporting current use, 14% for 16–17-year-olds and 17% for 18-year-olds.

Smoking and vaping

Since 2021, more young people report currently vaping compared to currently smoking. Young people who have smoked or still do smoke, are more likely to vape compared with young people who have never smoked.² Current vape use by never smokers is only 1.8%, whereas current vape use by former smokers was 26% and current smokers was 54%.² Dual use of tobacco and nicotine vapes has remained quite stable, with 2.8% of young people report currently smoking and vaping².

The proportion of young people who report never having smoked, but who have tried vaping, increased from 0.7% of 11–17-year-olds in 2021 to 1.9% in 2024 (but down from 2.3% in 2023)². Of these young people who have used nicotine vapes despite never having smoked, 76% report only trying it only *once* or *twice*².

Vaping initiation and reasons for use

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of 11–17-year-olds report that they got their first vape from a friend, followed by 10% who say that they ‘took it from someone’². However, vape use and reasons for use may change over time. One study of a small (n=8) friendship group of young people (16- and 17-year-olds) found that vape use and reasons for use changed over a relatively short period of time – 6 months. Initial use was driven by pleasure and social reasons, rather than the nicotine, and many of the young people went on to stop vaping. Those young people who continued vaping went on to report more private use (not socially driven) and because they wanted to reduce their tobacco use³.

In the most recent ASH survey of 11–17-year-olds, the main reason for vaping was to ‘Just to give it a try’ (35%), followed by ‘Other people use them, so I join in’ (14%) and ‘I like the flavours’ (12%).²

Device type and flavours

Single-use (disposable) vapes were the most popular vape device with young people in the 2024. Fifty-four percent of 11–17-year-olds reported using disposable vapes, with Elf bars being the most popular brand; 48% of young people reporting use, followed by crystal bar (34%) and Lost Mary (31%). Interestingly 28% report they didn’t know/didn’t want to say what vape device they used. Use of disposable vapes may have peaked in 2023, when use was reported at 69%.²

Fruit flavours are the most popular for young people (as they are for adults), with 59% of 11–17-year-olds surveyed preferring this, followed by *chocolate/desserts/sweet/coffee/vanilla or candy flavours*².

Vape access

Whilst it is illegal for vapes to be sold to under 18’s, 71% of 11-15-year-olds reported buying their vapes. In a rapid one-off review of sales compliance by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI), 422 test purchases were made using young people to attempt to purchase a disposable vape. Illegal sales were made on 145 occasions (33% of purchases)⁴. Most (48%) report buying vapes from a shop followed by buying from other people (27%)². Online purchases

and purchases from market stalls were less common in young people^{1,2}. Of those young people who currently vape 54% also report being given vapes, mainly by friends¹.

References

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3. McKeganey N, Barnard M. Change and Continuity in Vaping and Smoking by Young People: A Qualitative Case Study of A Friendship Group. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2018 May 17;15(5):1008. doi: 10.3390/ijerph15051008. PMID: 29772812; PMCID: PMC5982047.
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