

Preventing Youth Smoking



Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, causing more than 480,000 premature deaths annually and costing the nation over \$289 billion in health care expenses and other economic losses every year.

While overall tobacco use has decreased substantially in recent yearsⁱ, there has been an expansion of novel tobacco technologies that has the potential to diminish the progress that has been made. Specifically, youth use of e-cigarettes or vaping is on the rise. Data from various studies demonstrate that, across all tobacco product categories measured from 2011 to 2019, youth use either decreased or remained constant for all categories except e-cigarette use.^{ii, iii, iv}

According to the 2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey, e-cigarette use more than doubled (11.7% to 27.5%) for high school students and more than tripled (3.3% to 10.5%) for middle school students from 2017 to 2019.^v The survey also found that over 5 million youth have used e-cigarettes in the past 30 days, with nearly 1 million youth reporting daily e-cigarette use.^v This data contrast overall adult e-cigarette use in the U.S., which in 2018 was 3.2%, down from 3.7% in 2014.^{vi}

This trend is also troubling given the growing body of research demonstrating the strong connection between e-cigarette use and future use of other tobacco products, which have potentially more severe health consequences.^{vii, viii, ix} Because nine out of 10 smokers start by age 18 or younger,^x preventing youth tobacco use is key to prevent unnecessary death and disease in the United States. While committed to reducing tobacco consumption broadly, APHA is especially concerned about e-cigarette use in young adults.

Flavor and industry marketing are key drivers in the growth of youth e-cigarette use. Specifically, a third of youth say they vape because of flavors, which mask the taste of tobacco and make it easier for more youth to begin using tobacco products in general. In fact, seven out of 10 youth surveyed in the 2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey indicated that they used e-cigarettes because, “they come in flavors I like.” Further, the survey found that over half of youth smokers – including seven in 10 African American youth smokers – use menthol cigarettes.

For decades, tobacco companies have marketed their deadly products to children and young adults, deceived consumers about the harm their products cause and failed to take meaningful action to make their products less harmful or less addictive. In total, tobacco companies spent \$9.36 billion on advertisement and promotion of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco in 2017 – or about \$1 million per hour.^{xi, xii}

The three most heavily advertised brands – Marlboro, Newport and Camel – were the preferred brands of cigarettes smoked by middle school and high school students in 2016.^{xiii} In addition, a leading e-cigarette brand, JUUL, spent more than \$1 million to market its products on the internet and has invested heavily in social media campaigns on Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, which all cater to a youth audience.

Whether intended for a youth or adult audience, flavors and marketing are strong drivers propelling the growth of e-cigarette use, which has the potential to cripple the public health community’s strong history of smoking cessation and regulation efforts. The American Public Health Association supports policies that aim to regulate traditional tobacco products and novel technologies, such as e-cigarettes, and efforts to increase funding for tobacco control initiatives to help current smokers quit and to prevent youth from starting to use tobacco products.

To reduce youth tobacco use, APHA supports:

PROHIBITION ON ALL FLAVORED TOBACCO PRODUCTS As a key influence on youth smoking initiation that eases the harsh flavor of tobacco and thus supports recurrent use, all flavored e-cigarettes, including menthol, cigars and menthol cigarettes must be prohibited.

ELIMINATION OF TOBACCO MARKETING TO YOUTH According to the 2014 U.S. Surgeon General’s report, “the evidence is sufficient to conclude that advertising and promotional activities by the tobacco companies cause the onset and continuation of smoking among adolescents and young adults.”

- APHA urges FDA to establish regulations that hold e-cigarettes to the same marketing and advertising rules as conventional tobacco cigarettes.
- APHA urges FDA to implement graphic health warnings on cigarette packs and advertising that are required under the 2009 Tobacco Control Act.
- APHA calls for the elimination of tobacco product placement in feature films below an R-rating.

COST AS A FORM OF REGULATION Price has a significant impact on the number of people who start using tobacco products, the intensity of tobacco use and the number of tobacco users who quit. The 2009 federal tobacco tax increase resulted in an immediate impact on youth smoking. Thus, APHA calls for increased taxes on tobacco products.

SOURCES

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