HSC Public Health Agency

Behavioural Insights into Youth Vaping in Northern Ireland

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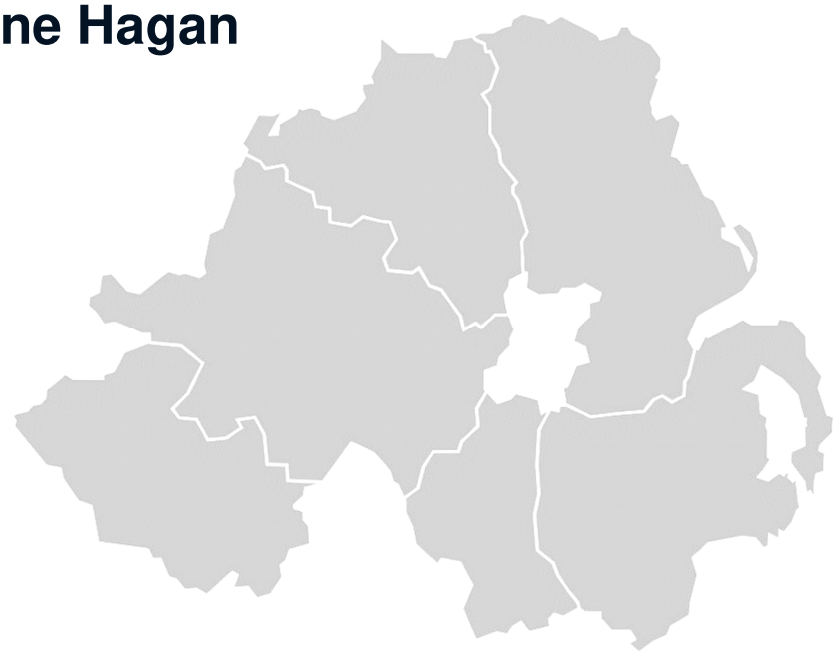

Acknowledgements

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Terms of use

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Summary of findings

- Around one in ten young people had tried a cigarette (9%), and 5% are current smokers.
- Current smoking prevalence was highest among those in the upper Year Groups with prevalence ranging from 1% in Year 8 to 18% in Year 14.
- The majority (66%) had tried cigarettes out of curiosity.
- One in five young people (20%) had tried a vape (ever-vapers), and 15% are current vapers.
- Of current vapers, 53% are regular users.
- Approximately two thirds of regular users vape daily (65%).
- Those in Year 14 are 10 times more likely to currently vape than those in Year 8 (46% and 4% respectively).
- Of ever-vapers, 7% had regularly smoked cigarettes before they started vaping.
- The majority of ever-vapers had never smoked before starting to vape (76%), of these 33% have since experimented with cigarettes, with 16% continuing to smoke.
- Three in five young people (60%) had at least one friend who vaped, with current vapers being more likely to have a friend who vaped (95%) compared to never vapers (53%).
- The most common reason for trying a vape was 'out of curiosity' (74%).
- Some young people had experienced side effects as a result of vaping, with light-headedness, dizziness, headaches and breathlessness being the most common.
- Single-use disposables were the most popular vaping device among young people.
- Fruit flavours were most common.
- Over half of ever-vapers frequently used a high concentration of nicotine 20mg/2%.
- Flavouring and taste (59%), and relaxation and stress relief (51%) were considered very important factors when it came to vaping.
- Vapes could be easily accessed, with family and friends being the most common source (52%), followed by retail shops (46%).
- Young people found it easy to purchase vapes with only half being asked (at least once) to verify their age when making a purchase.
- Focus groups highlighted regular exposure to the marketing of vapes with retailers showcasing their vapes in front-facing product displays, on posters and signs within and outside local shops
- Both young people and teachers were of the view that the promotion of vapes was targeted at young people.
- Teachers highlighted how vaping among young people was a growing concern within their school, with increase in numbers vaping over recent years.
- Schools have taken measures to try to minimise the use of vapes such as formal policies to enforce a no vaping culture, monitoring of toilets at breaktimes, and installation of vape detectors.

Introduction

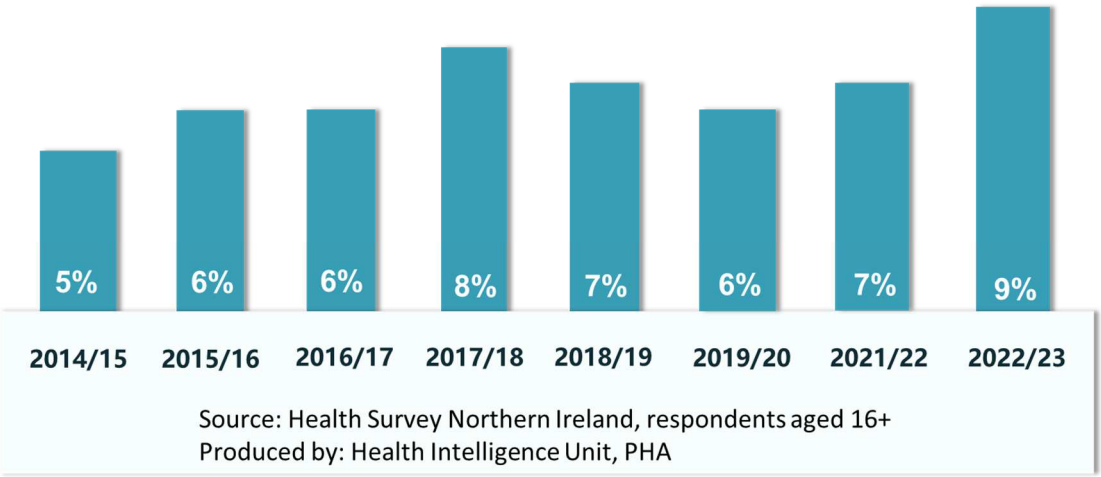
An e-cigarette is a battery-powered device, enabling vaporised aerosol liquids to be inhaled into the lungs[1]. Vaping simulates the act of smoking traditional tobacco products. The devices used to vape are known by many different names including 'e-cigarettes', 'e-cigs', 'electronic nicotine delivery systems', 'mods', 'vapes', 'tank systems' and 'e-hookahs'. Most devices contain a battery, a heating element and a place to hold the liquid.

The device works by heating a liquid to create the aerosol. This liquid may contain nicotine, additives, flavours such as fruit, candy, mint, menthol, and over 30 other chemicals that can be toxic such as cancer-causing chemicals including nickel, tin, lead, formaldehyde and diacetyl, a chemical linked to lung disease[2]. While users inhale this aerosol into their lungs by choice others may also passively inhale the vapour second hand when the user exhales[3].

Prevalence of e-cigarette use in Northern Ireland

In 2022/23, 9% of the adult population (aged 16+) within Northern Ireland were current users of e-cigarettes, equating to approximately 136,900 people*¥.

Figure 1: **E-cigarette prevalence in Northern Ireland 2014/15 to 2022/23 (those aged 16+ years)[4]**



By gender, slightly more males reported use of e-cigarettes (10%) than females (8%) and those aged 16-24 years (20%) and 25-34 years (14%) had the highest proportion of use[4].

* Based on 2022 Mid Year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland. Available from: 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (nisra.gov.uk)

¥ Please note figures from the 2020/21 Health Survey have not been included as the survey was based on a smaller sample size due to changes in the methodology during the COVID pandemic meaning a lack of comparability to previous years.

Latest results also show that e-cigarette prevalence was higher in the most deprived areas (13%) than in the least deprived areas (7%) (see Table 1)[4].

Table 1: E-cigarette use by gender, age and deprivation (2014/15 to 2022/23)[5]

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2021/22	2022/23
Gender								
Male	6%	6%	6%	8%	8%	7%	7%	10%
Female	4%	5%	6%	7%	6%	5%	7%	8%
Age group								
16-24 years	4%	5%	6%	11%	8%	6%	12%	20%
25-34 years	7%	7%	8%	9%	12%	8%	9%	14%
35-44 years	6%	7%	8%	10%	6%	6%	8%	7%
45-54 years	5%	8%	8%	6%	7%	7%	6%	7%
55-64 years	6%	5%	7%	7%	7%	8%	7%	6%
65-74 years	3%	3%	3%	5%	5%	3%	3%	4%
75+ years	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Deprivation								
Most deprived	8%	8%	9%	11%	10%	8%	10%	13%
Least deprived	4%	3%	4%	6%	7%	5%	8%	7%

Source: Health Survey Northern Ireland, respondents aged 16+

The 2022 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) reports that 21.3% of young people aged 11-16 years in Northern Ireland have ever tried an e-cigarette, with 9.2% of young people saying they have used an e-cigarette in the last week[5]. This represents approximately 32,270 young people, who are using e-cigarettes in the last week. Trends show the proportion who have ever used e-cigarettes has been increasing, alongside those who are current or regular users (Table 2). Prevalence is much higher amongst older children, with 24% of Year 12 children currently vaping.

Table 2: E-cigarette trends, YBAS, 2016 – 2022

	Ever used e-cigarettes			Current e-cigarette user*			Regular e-cigarette user**		
	2016	2019	2022	2016	2019	2022	2016	2019	2022
All	19.0%	20.1%	21.3%	4.9%	5.7%	9.2%	2.7%	3.0%	6.3%
Gender									
Boys	22.7%	24.2%	21.8%	6.1%	7.5%	8.9%	3.4%	4.2%	6.3%
Girls	15.3%	16.0%	20.8%	3.7%	4.0%	9.4%	1.9%	1.8%	6.3%
Year Group									
Year 8	2.1%	3.9%	6.0%	0%	1.1%	1.7%	0%	0.7%	0.8%
Year 9	10.1%	9.7%	10.9%	2.1%	2.2%	2.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.5%
Year 10	18.8%	20.5%	18.5%	5.8%	5.9%	7.2%	3.1%	3.2%	4.5%
Year 11	27.8%	31.5%	28.1%	6.9%	8.6%	11.8%	3.4%	3.8%	8.5%
Year 12	36.4%	37.8%	43.9%	9.9%	11.7%	23.6%	5.6%	6.6%	16.5%

*Current e-cigarette user includes those who indicated that they use e-cigarettes every day, at least once a week, or less than once a week.**Regular e-cigarette user includes those who indicated that they use e-cigarettes every day or at least once a week.

The 2022 survey found the most popular reason for ever trying an e-cigarette was because they saw a friend using one, so wanted to try it (34%). Of those who had used e-cigarettes, seven in ten said the first one they tried was from a friend/someone they were hanging around with. For current users of e-cigarettes, the main reason for doing so was because they enjoy it (29%), followed by stress (23%). For those who currently use e-cigarettes, almost all (86%) use disposables. Main reasons being they are less expensive (27%) and there is more of a variety of flavours (26%).

Impact of e-cigarette use

E-cigarettes have prompted an intense and polarised public health debate with conflicting evidence published on a regular basis. On the one hand advocates promote their harm reduction and smoking cessation potential. However, this is countered with evidence of the risks associated with their use; stalled smoking cessation through dual use[§]; and their potential to act as a gateway to conventional cigarette smoking among young people.

Additionally, research suggests that, while e-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking tobacco, they are not harm free. A 2020 review of e-cigarette safety concluded that vaping is not harmless and should only be used as a stop smoking aid[6]. The review noted that vaping is likely to be associated with a reduction in overall health risks compared to smoking. However, the long-term health consequences of vaping are unclear and not possible to predict. Other research has identified a number of harms associated with e-cigarette use including cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and cancers, and featured few reported benefits[7,8]. E-cigarettes can also cause unintended injuries with evidence of

[§] Dual use refers to the continued concurrent use of conventional combustible cigarettes by e-cigarette users.

defective batteries causing fires and explosions[9]. It is clear that more information is needed regarding the long-term harms of e-cigarettes[5].

Evidence of the efficacy of e-cigarettes as an aid to quit smoking when compared to other licensed smoking cessation methods is variable. A Cochrane review of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation published in October 2020 reported that more people quit smoking if they used e-cigarettes containing nicotine than if they used another form of nicotine replacement therapy[10]. In contrast an evidence review by the Health Research Board (HRB) in Ireland published in October 2020 found that e-cigarettes were not more effective than approved nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) in helping people to stop smoking. Subsequently this review questioned the need for e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation intervention[11].

Globally concerns have been raised regarding awareness and use of e-cigarettes by young people. Evidence suggests that e-cigarettes are promoted in ways that appeal to young people through flavours and descriptions, traditional advertising sources such as indoor marketing, and also through social media[12,13]. Studies have found that initially young people are particularly attracted to flavoured e-cigarettes such as fruit[14,15]. A recent study found that the most frequently used vape flavouring for children is 'fruit flavour' with 60% of current children using them. In addition to this, 17% of children who vape choose sweet flavours such as chocolate or candy and 4.8% choose to vape energy or soft drink flavours[16]. Currently there are also no restrictions on the point of sale of e-cigarettes which means they can be displayed in aisles, close to sweets and confectionary products and near tills. Research has found that the likelihood of children aged 11-18 years noticing e-cigarettes has increased[17]. The lack of restrictions on their packaging also means they can be marketed in a range of bright colours and this has been found to be appealing to young people[18].

There is also concern as to whether e-cigarette use is a precursor to the smoking of conventional cigarettes. A survey of young people in Northern Ireland reported that 26% of those who had tried smoking conventional cigarettes did so because they had first tried e-cigarettes and wanted to try conventional cigarettes. Similarly, 38% of those who had ever tried e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes had tried e-cigarettes first[19]. An evidence review of e-cigarette use and tobacco cigarette smoking in adolescents conducted by the Health Research Board (HRB) in Ireland found that those adolescents who had ever used an e-cigarette were between three and five times more likely to start smoking compared to those who never used e-cigarettes[20]. Other research has showed that whilst local young people perceived vaping as a healthier option than smoking, 80% stated they had not received any school education around it[21].

Moreover, most e-cigarettes contain nicotine which is highly addictive and this can harm adolescent and young brain development, which continues into mid-20s[22]. Using nicotine as an adolescent can harm the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood and impulse control[23]. The use of e-cigarettes amongst young people has also been associated with mental health symptoms such as depression[24,25].

International and Northern Ireland Government Policy

Internationally, different positions have been taken on vapes. Whilst some countries ban them completely; others, such as England, USA, New Zealand and Canada recognise them as a smoking cessation tool[12], however restrictions are in place to prevent them being sold to under 18s.

In Northern Ireland, e-cigarettes are not endorsed as a smoking cessation tool as evidence is inconclusive on their effectiveness and also their risks. Whilst the Ten-year Tobacco Control Strategy for Northern Ireland primarily focused on tobacco use, in recognition of the potential for e-cigarette use to act as a gateway to smoking and the harms nicotine can cause to adolescent cognitive development, the Department of Health introduced regulations in 2022 which banned the sale of e-cigarettes to under 18's. It also became an offence to purchase such products on behalf of a child (a proxy purchasing offence)[26].

Furthermore, unlike tobacco products, there are no restrictions in the point of sale of e-cigarettes, their packaging or the flavours used in them in Northern Ireland or other parts of the UK. Since fieldwork for this study was completed, the UK government consulted on plans to create the first smoke free generation and measures to reduce the appeal and availability of vapes to children. Following the consultation, the UK government announced key plans in January 2024, which include:

- The creation of the first smoke-free generation so children turning 15 this year or younger will never be legally sold tobacco. The age of sale will be raised by one year each year to prevent future generations from ever taking up smoking, as there is no safe age to smoke.
- Banning of disposable vapes.
- The introduction of new powers to reduce the appeal of vapes to children by restricting vape flavours and packaging.
- £100 fixed penalty fines for shops in England and Wales which sell vapes illegally to children. Trading standards officers will be empowered to act 'on the spot' to tackle underage tobacco and vape sales.

In response to this announcement, the Health Minister in Northern Ireland confirmed that NI would be included in the UK government's plans.

Evidence shows that e-cigarette use among young people (sample aged 11-16 years) in Northern Ireland is increasing (YPBAS)[5], raising concerns among those working in public health, education and policy. Vaping among young people is influenced by many factors, including social-environmental surroundings. One of the primary environments where young people engage in vaping is when in school[27], therefore teaching staff can play a vital role in understanding this vaping trend. There is a gap in research conducted within NI to gain comprehensive insights into the prevalence, perceptions and experiences of vaping among young people (aged 11-18 years), as well as the perspectives of teachers who interact with this population group on a regular basis. This is the first piece of research conducted in NI

to explore the views of young people (aged 11-18 years) and teaching staff within post-primary schools on vaping among this young population group.

A mixed method approach was employed to explore the prevalence, patterns of use, social influences, perceptions and experiences of vaping among young people in Northern Ireland and to gain insights from teachers on their experience, perceptions, and the strategies they may employ to address vaping within their schools. By understanding the key factors which influence vaping among young people, this research can help inform legislation on the sales, access and advertising of vaping products. It can help inform policy, public health initiatives, and educational resources to promote healthier lifestyle choices and reduce the uptake of vaping among young people.

Aims and Objectives

Research aims

To assess the views and experiences of young people aged 11-18 years towards e-cigarette use. To understand their knowledge and perceptions of health risks; why young people vape and identify any barriers that may prevent young people to stop using e-cigarettes/vapes.

To gain further insight on vaping among young people from views and experiences of staff within post-primary schools and the impact this may have within the school environment.

Research objectives

This study had two primary objectives:

To explore and understand

- **Behavioural insights into youth vaping -** past and current use; frequency of use; access and supply; device type, flavours and nicotine content; side effects.
- **Knowledge and perceptions of vaping -** perceived harm/risks; content/ ingredients; legislation; services; promotion.
- **Beliefs and attitudes –** perceived facilitators and barriers to not vaping and vaping; benefits; self-efficacy to avoid vaping or to quit; second-hand vapour.

To inform

This research will help inform the **future design of targeted interventions and communications** with regards to vape use by young people.

Methodology

The Health Intelligence Unit (HIU) within the Public Health Agency (PHA) carried out research which adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to explore the increase in uptake of e-cigarette use among young people within Northern Ireland.

This study includes three components: -

- Online survey with young people aged 11-18 years within NI.
- Focus groups with young people aged 11-18 years within NI.
- Interviews with staff from post-primary schools within NI.

Study design

An on-line cross-sectional survey was conducted with 11-18 year olds residing in Northern Ireland. The questionnaire was piloted and tested with pupils in one post-primary school to ensure that the survey questions and layout were unambiguous, and conducive to data collection. The survey was open from 24th April to 30th June 2023 with a reminder email issued halfway. The survey was promoted via social media and by a range of stakeholders, including the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) and Cancer Focus NI. Young people attending post-primary schools within Northern Ireland were invited to participate in the survey. All respondents provided informed consent to participate.

Sample and recruitment

Online survey

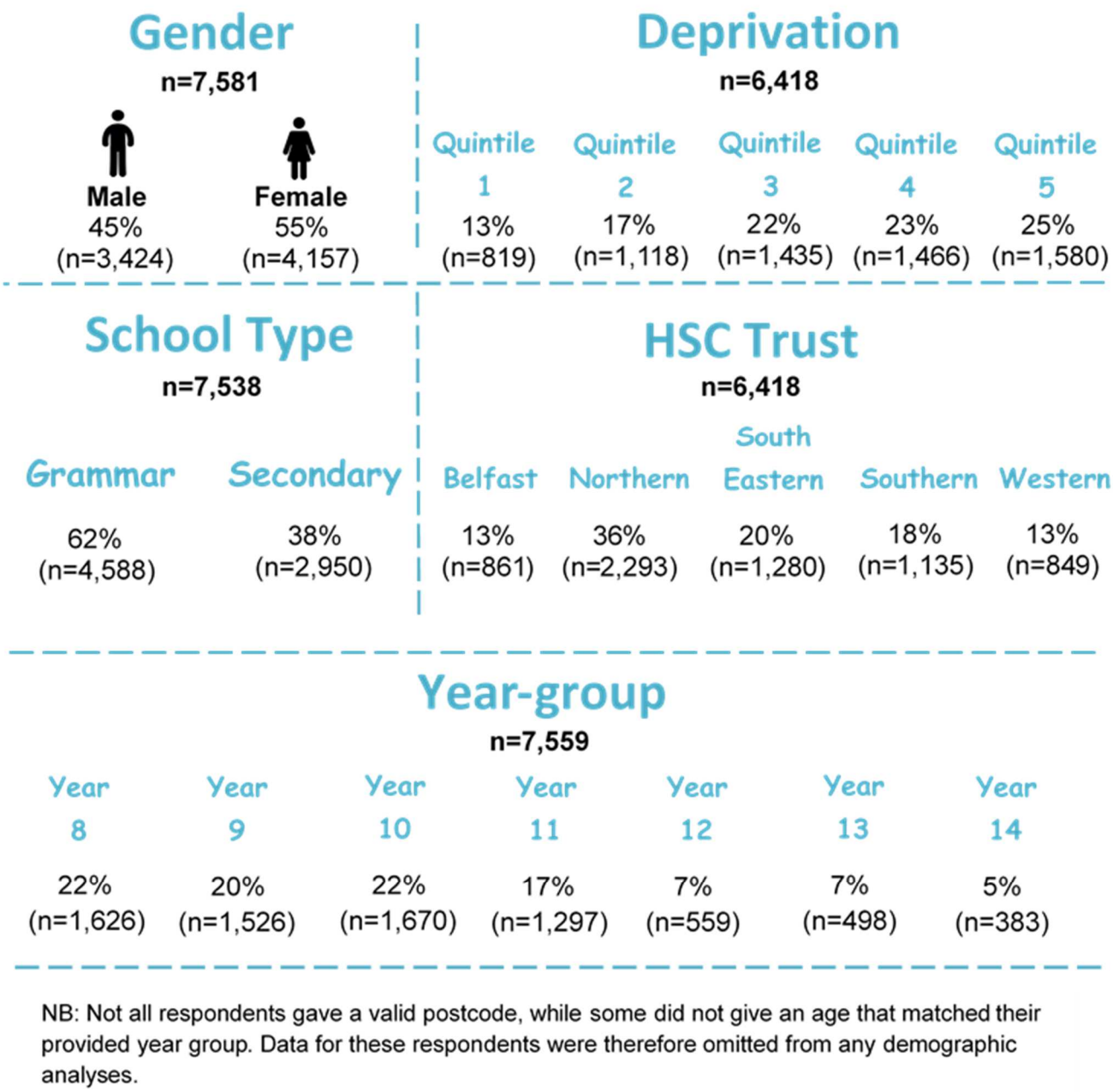
As the target population were young people aged 11-18 years, it was decided that the best way to access this population group was recruitment through post-primary schools.

Email correspondence was sent out to **all** post-primary schools within Northern Ireland (n=192) via CCEA on behalf of the Public Health Agency asking for their support in conducting this research. School correspondence explained the research aims, process, and the protocol for participation, along with a letter to inform parents of the study and a flyer inviting all pupils to participate. This correspondence was then followed up with phone calls and further emails from research staff to encourage schools to promote the survey and to disseminate the information to both parents and pupils.

Ninety-one post-primary schools sent out the information to pupils and parents; a school response rate of 47%. Pupils and parents were given information about the survey which

explained the nature of the study, data collection and their anticipated role. Overall, a total of 7,581 young people participated in the survey (Figure 2). All respondents provided informed consent to participate.

Figure 2: Demographic profile of on-line survey participants



NB: Not all respondents gave a valid postcode, while some did not give an age that matched their provided year group. Data for these respondents were therefore omitted from any demographic analyses.

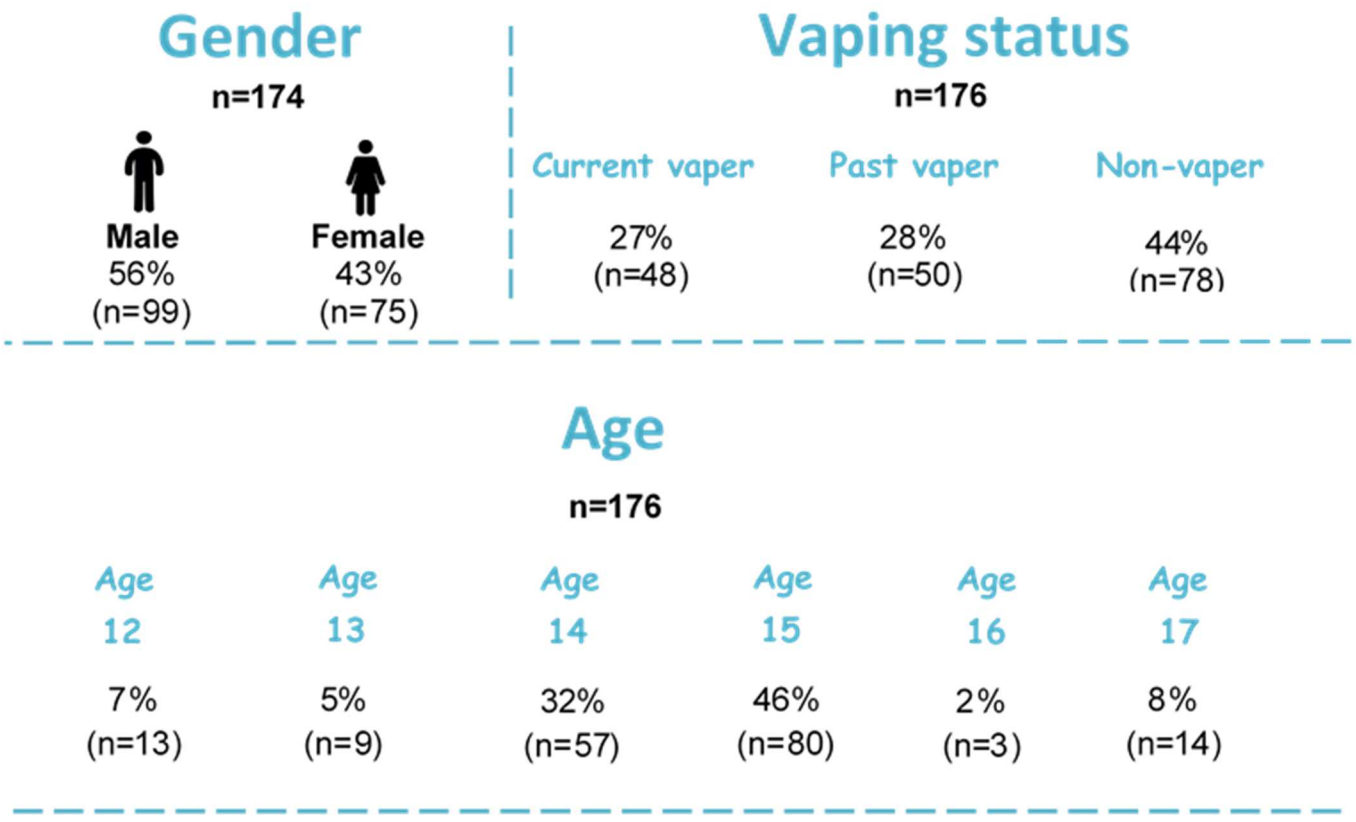
Focus groups

The PHA engaged with our Stakeholders (Cancer Focus and Bogside & Brandywell Health Forum) who liaised with schools they worked with to arrange for research staff to conduct Focus Groups within a number of post-primary schools. Sample criterion was eight to ten

participants in each group. However, on some occasions when research staff arrived at schools to conduct the Focus Groups they were taken to a classroom full of 20+ pupils.

A total of 12 Focus groups were conducted between 20th June and the 29th June 2023, equating to a total sample of 176 young people aged 12-17 years.

Figure 3: Demographic profile of focus group participants



It is important to note that although some young people indicated that they did not vape at the beginning of the focus groups, it became evident from discussions and responses given that they had used or were currently using vapes. As young people did not correct their vaping status at any time during the discussions, vaping status was therefore reported as that which was disclosed at the beginning of focus groups.

Interviews with teaching staff

In the email correspondence sent out to **all** post-primary schools, teaching staff were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. This correspondence was then followed up with phone calls and further emails from research staff to encourage teachers to participate. Dates and times were arranged to conduct interviews with those staff who expressed an interest in participating. In total 14 interviews were conducted in person or via video call with teaching staff across 14 post-primary schools within NI (8 Grammar schools and 6

Secondary schools). Participants were made up of 6 from the Northern Trust, 2 from the South Eastern Trust, 3 from the Southern Trust and 3 from the Western Trust.

Semi-structured discussion guides were developed. Focus group discussions and interviews were audio-recorded with the consent from participants. Recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was carried out to identify key themes, patterns, and insights within the data. The data and any quotes within the report have been anonymised to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

Outcome measures

Smoking prevalence

A young person was classified as a current smoker if they indicated that they smoked cigarettes at least once a week, or less than once a week.

A young person, was classified as a regular smoker if they indicated that they smoked cigarettes at least once a week.

A family figure was classified as a smoker if the young person indicated that the family member smokes every day or sometimes.

Vaping prevalence

A young person was classified as a current user if they indicated they use a vaping device at least once a week, or less than once a week.

A young person, currently vaping, was classified as a regular user if they indicated they use a vaping device at least once a week.

A young person, currently vaping, was classified as an occasional user if they indicated they use a vaping device less than once a week.

A young person was classified as an experimental user if they indicated they only used a vaping device once or twice but don't use regularly.

A family figure was classified as a user if the young person indicated that the family member vapes every day or sometimes.

Terminology

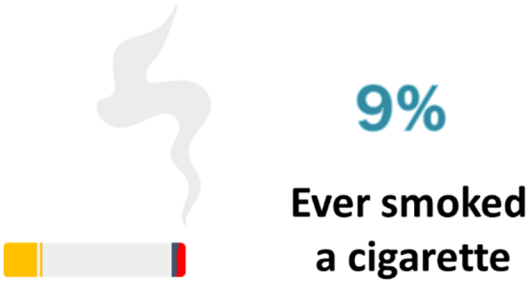
For consistency throughout the remainder of this report, we refer to e-cigarettes as 'vapes', and use the term 'vaping' to refer to the act of using an e-cigarette device.


Key findings
from Young
People's
online survey

Smoking Behaviour

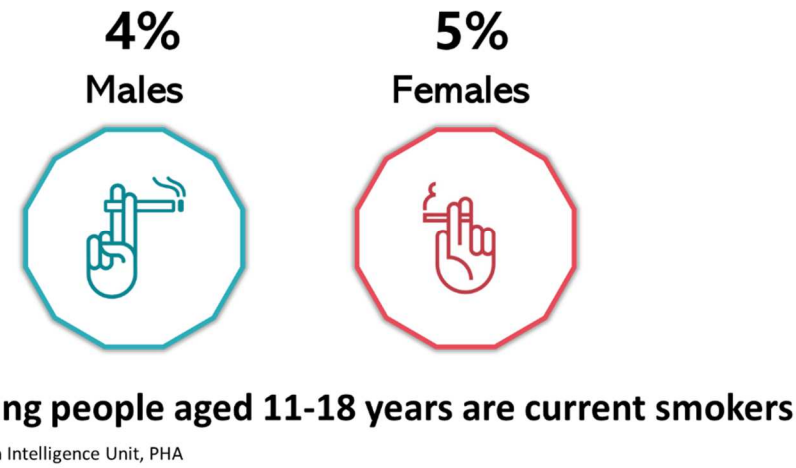
Prevalence of cigarette use

Overall, 9% of pupils reported having ever smoked a cigarette.



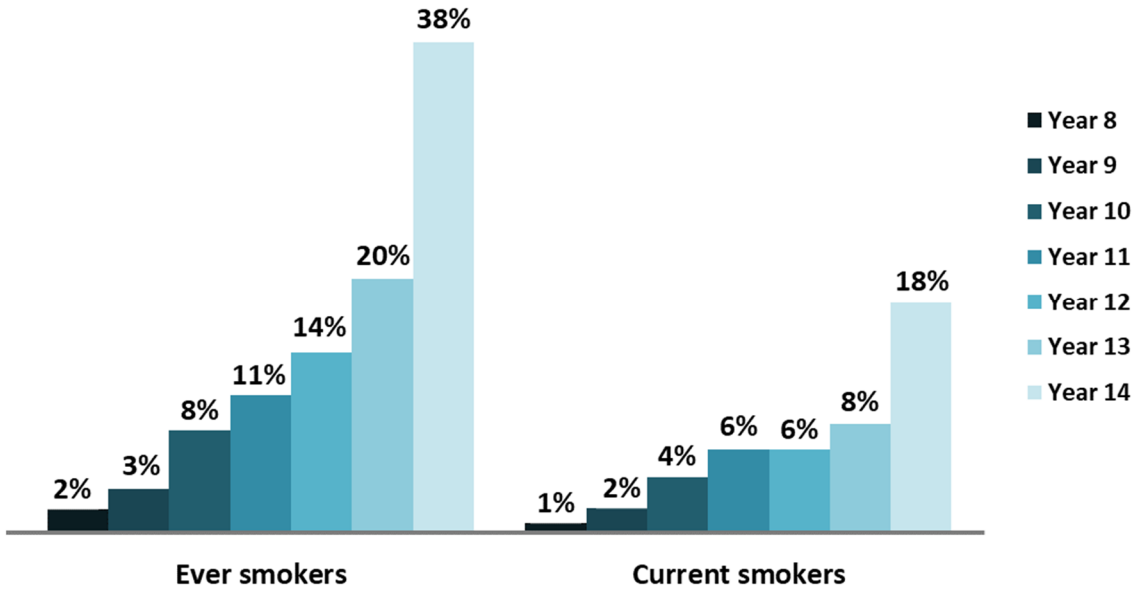
5% of respondents are current smokers. Of these, 46% were regular smokers, 16% were occasional smokers and 39% were experimental smokers. Among current smokers **26%** reported that they smoked daily.

The proportion of 'ever' smokers (9%) did not differ between males and females, with current smoking prevalence being slightly higher among females (5%) than males (4%).



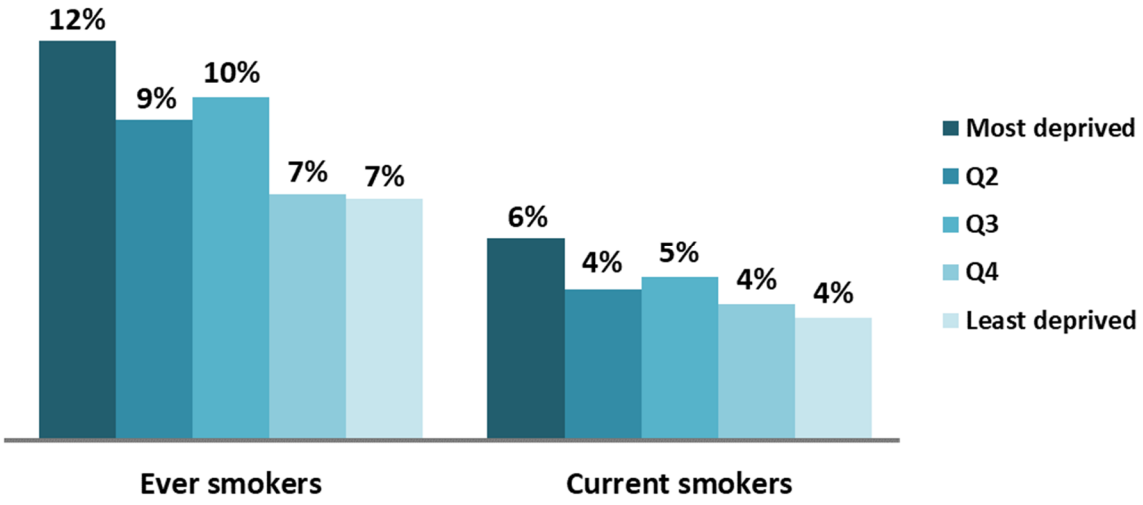
Young people in lower Year Groups are least likely to have tried a cigarette, with 5% of pupils in Year 8 – Year 10 having tried cigarettes compared to 17% of those in Year 11 - Year 14. Figure 4 highlights that the proportion of those who had ever tried a cigarette increased through the Year Groups, ranging from 2% among those pupils in Year 8 to 38% of those in Year 14. There was a similar pattern among current smokers with prevalence ranging from 1% among Year 8 pupils to 18% of Year 14 pupils.

Figure 4: Prevalence of cigarette use by Year Group



Young people living in the most deprived areas (12%) were more likely to have ever tried a cigarette in comparison to those living in the least deprived areas (7%), with 6% of those living in the most deprived areas being current smokers compared to 4% in the least deprived areas.

Figure 5: Prevalence of cigarette use by Pupils MDM Quintile



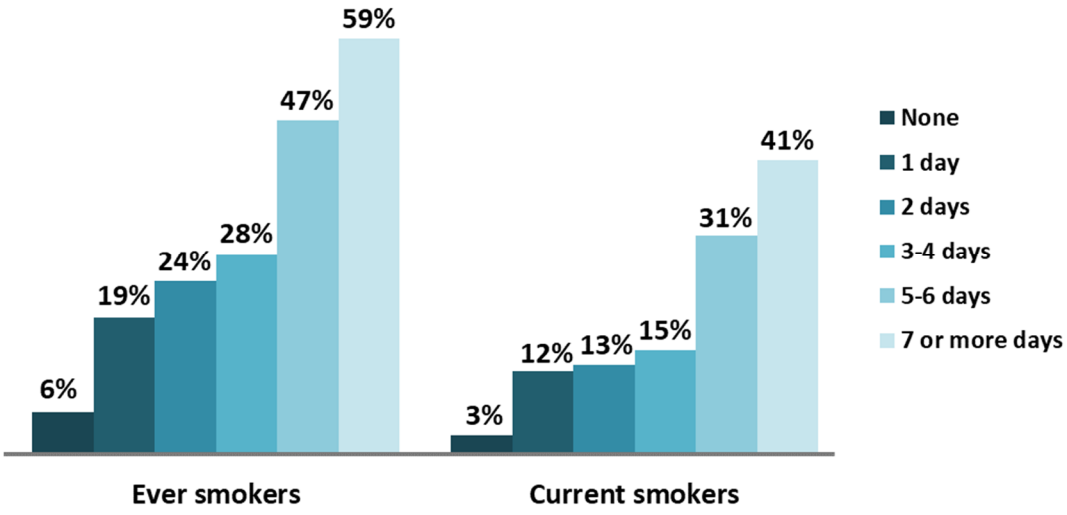
Pupils who indicated being entitled to free school meals were twice as likely to have tried a cigarette and/or currently smoke in comparison to those who were not entitled (15% and 8%; 8% and 4% respectively).

Pupils who had skipped or cut class over the last month were considerably more likely to have ever smoked a cigarette than those who had not skipped or cut class, with proportions

of those who had ever smoked increasing with number of days pupils reported having skipped a class (Figure 6). Ever use ranged from 6% among those who had not skipped a class to over half (59%) of those who had skipped class on 7 or more days.

A similar trend was observed in prevalence of current smokers, ranging from 3% of those who had never skipped a class to 41% among those who had skipped class on 7 or more days.

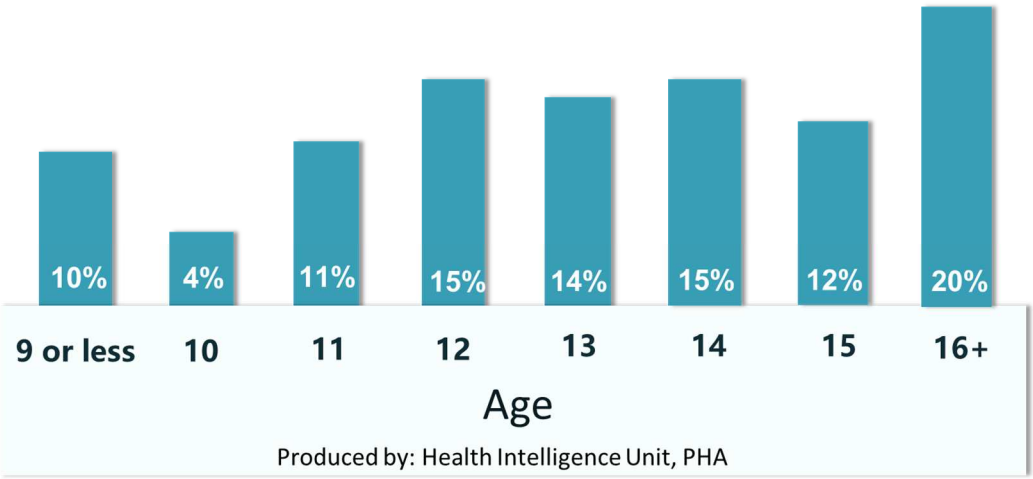
Figure 6: Prevalence of cigarette use by number of days a pupil had skipped class (during the last 30 days)



Age of first use

For the vast majority of ever smokers, experimentation with cigarettes began in their teenage years (Figure 7). Of concern, 14% had tried their first cigarette at age 10 or below (primary school age).

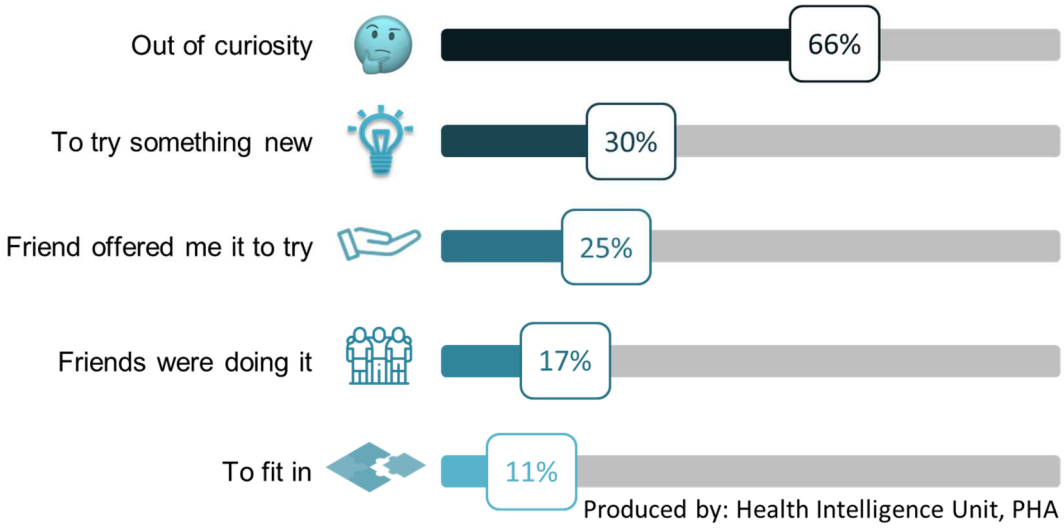
Figure 7: Age when smoked first cigarette (%) (n=690)



Reasons for trying cigarettes

Of those respondents who had ever smoked a cigarette, a variety of reasons was given for why they had first tried (Figure 8). The most common reason was '*out of curiosity*' (66%), followed by '*to try something new*' (30%). One in four indicated that it was because they had been offered one by a friend (25%). For a small minority they were used as a coping mechanism (e.g. to relieve stress or anxiety) (3%). It should be noted that the majority of respondents gave a combination of reasons.

Figure 8: Reasons for trying a cigarette (%) (n=690)



Future intentions

The vast majority of never smokers were of the opinion that they would not smoke a cigarette within the next year (96% probably/definitely not). Whereas, 64% of current smokers felt that they definitely/probably will, with 21% of past smokers indicating that it was likely that they would (Figure 9).

Figure 9: If will smoke anytime during the next year (%) (n=7,581)

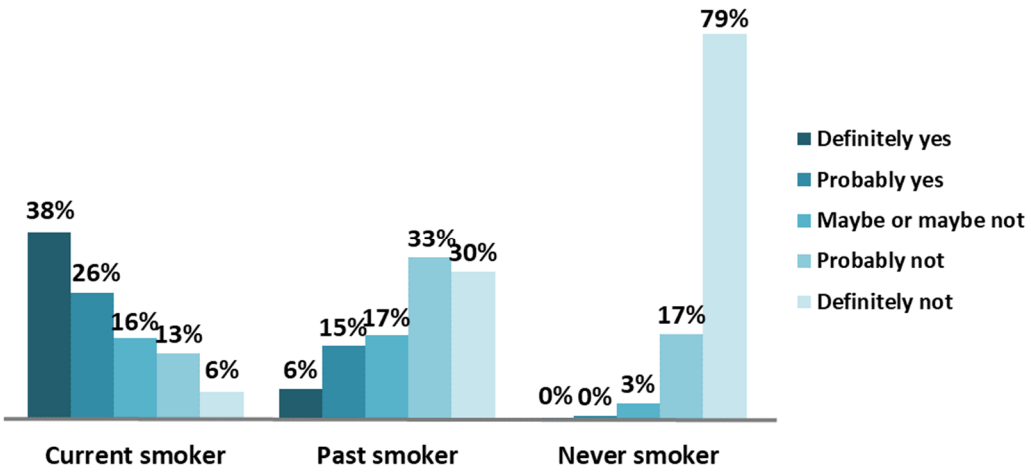
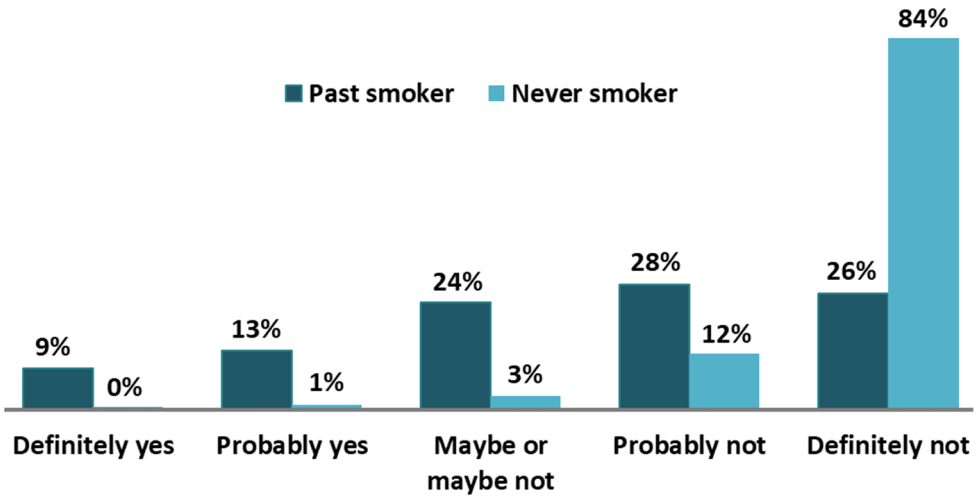


Figure 10 demonstrates that when asked if they would smoke a cigarette if offered one by a friend, never smokers were considerably more likely to indicate that they would not (probably/definitely not) compared to those who were past smokers (96% and 54% respectively).

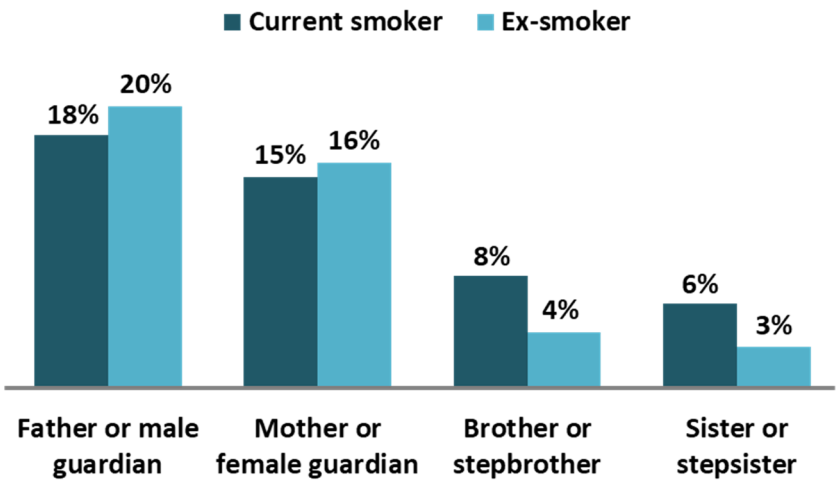
Figure 10: If would smoke if offered a cigarette by a friend (%) (n=7,223)



Family smoking status

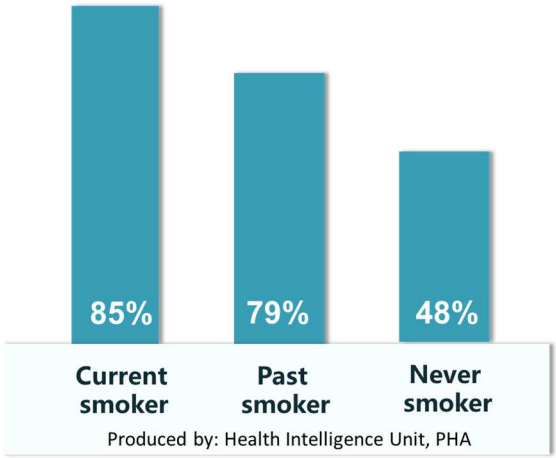
Overall, 51% of young people reported having an immediate family member who had ever smoked cigarettes. Figure 11 shows the break-down by family member and smoking status.

Figure 11: Prevalence of cigarette use among immediate family members



Young people who had ever smoked cigarettes were most likely to have an immediate family member who had ever smoked compared to young people who had never smoked cigarettes as illustrated in Figure 12 below.

Figure 12: Proportion of immediate family members who have ever smoked by young person's current smoking status (%) (n=7,581)

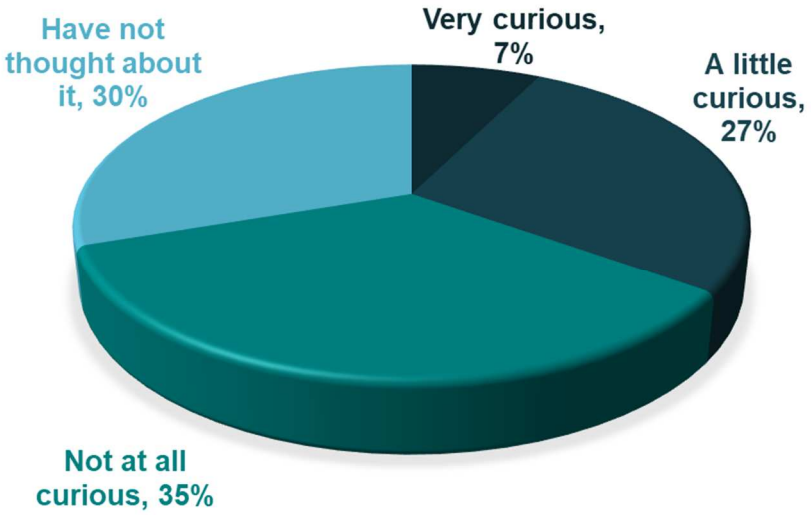


E-cigarettes

98%

of young people indicated that they had seen or heard of vapes before this survey.

When asked if they had ever been curious about vaping, the majority of young people (65%) reported that they had been not at all curious or had not thought about it. Seven percent indicated that they had been very curious, with 27% indicating that they had been a little curious.



Young people in Year 14 were more likely to indicate that they had been very curious about vaping (19%) compared to those in other year groups (ranging from 4% to 10%). Proportions of those who indicated that they had been a little curious increased by Year Group, ranging from 23% in Year 8 to 36% in Year 14.

1 in 4 never-vapers reported having been curious about vaping, with 2% indicating that they had been very curious about vaping, and 22% indicating that they had been a little curious.

Ever used a vape

In general, the majority of young people have never used a vape. Overall, one in five young people reported having ever used a vape.

20%

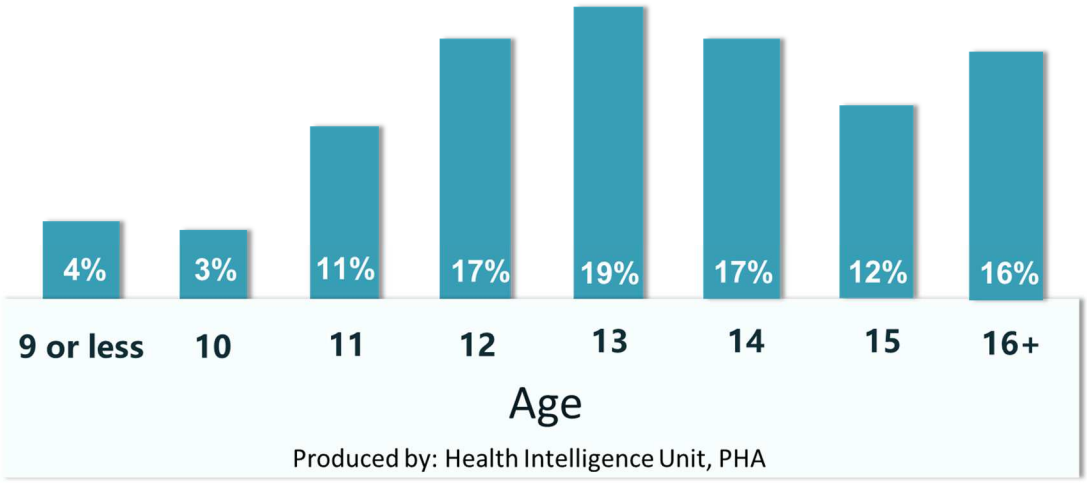
Have tried a vape

Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

Age of initiation

Of those who had ever used a vape, the majority had first tried a vape between the ages of 12 and 14 years. Sixteen percent tried their first vape at age 16 years and over. For a minority (8%), initiation occurred at age 10 or younger. Please refer to Figure 13 below for breakdown by age of first use.

Figure 13: Age when used first vape (%) (n=1,487)



On further analysis of those who had ever used a vape by key demographic subgroups, males were more likely than females to have experimented with vapes at a younger age, with 13% of males reporting that they had first tried a vape at age 10 or below compared to 4% of females.

Those young people living in the least deprived areas were more likely to have tried their first vape at a later age (age 14 or over) than those who lived in the most deprived areas (56% and 34% respectively), with proportions increasing through the quintiles.

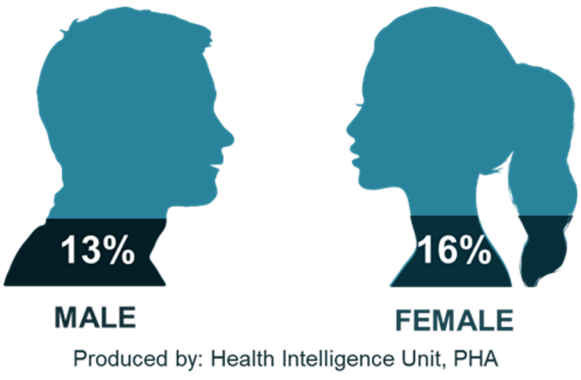
Young people who indicated that they were entitled to free school meals were twice as likely to have tried their first vape at the age of 11 or below (27%), in comparison to 14% of those who indicated that they were not entitled to free school meals.

Those who had skipped or cut class on 7 or more days over the last month were considerably more likely to have tried their first vape at a young age (aged 10 or younger) than those who had never skipped or cut class (28% and 5% respectively).

Current vaping status

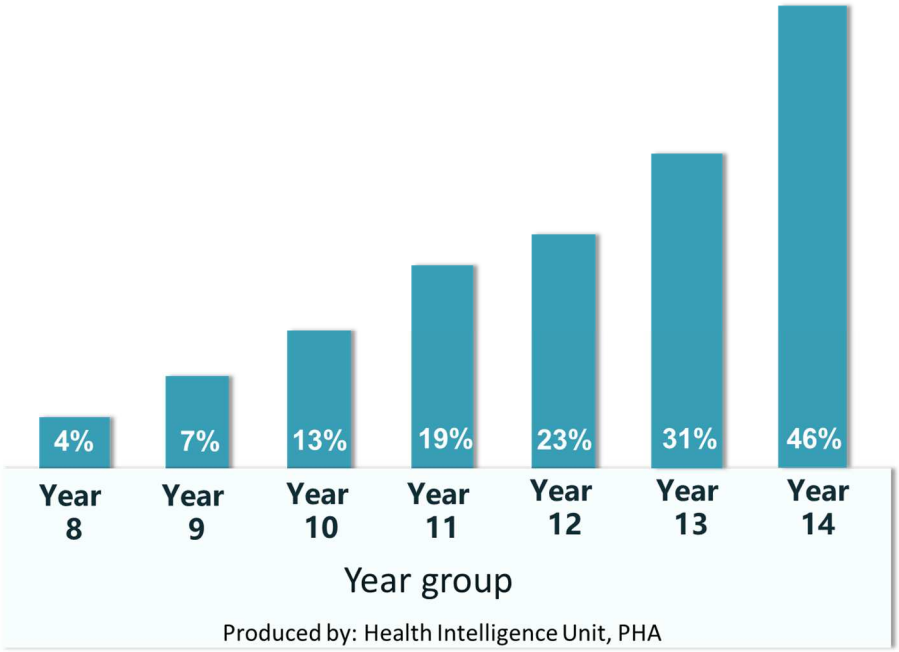
Overall, 15% of young people reported that they currently engage in vaping, whether as regular users (8%), occasional users (2%) or as an experiment (5%).

A slightly higher proportion of females (16%) currently vape than males (13%).



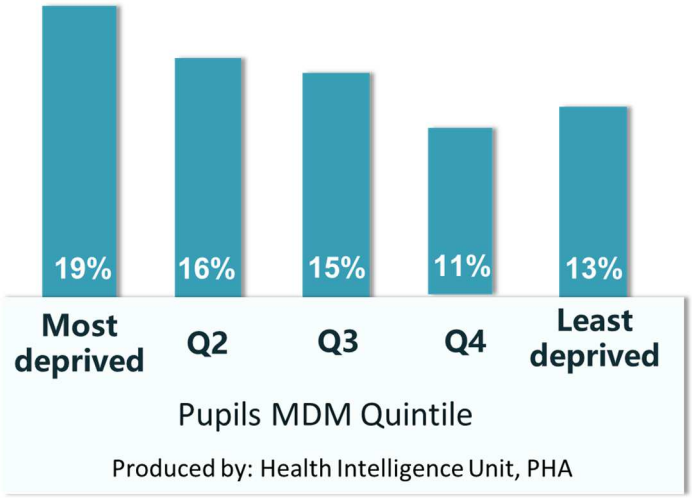
Young people in the upper year groups were considerably more likely to be current vapers than those in the lower year groups, with Year 14 pupils being 10 times more likely to be a current vaper than those in Year 8. Prevalence of current vape use increased through the year groups ranging from 4% among Year 8 pupils to 46% among Year 14 pupils.

Figure 14: Prevalence of current vape use by Year Group



Prevalence of current use was higher among young people who lived in the most deprived areas compared to those living in the least deprived areas as illustrated in Figure 15.

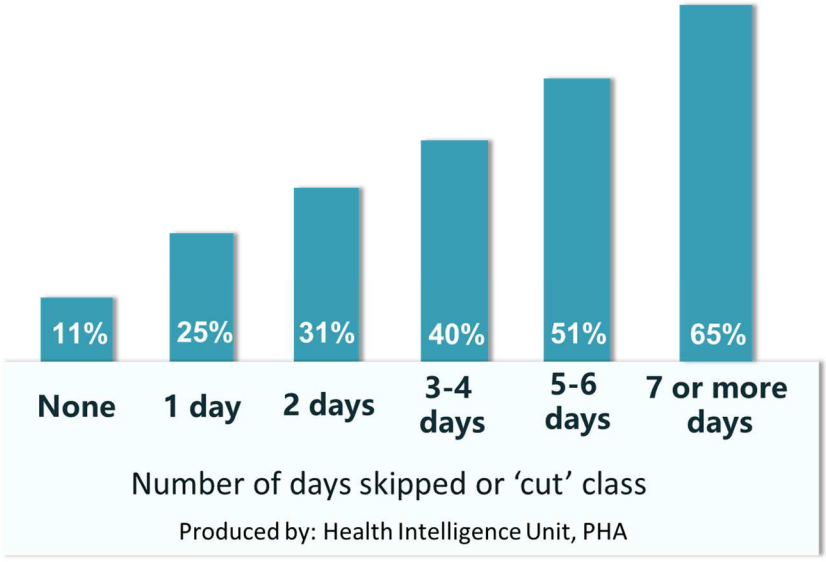
Figure 15: Prevalence of current vape use by Pupils MDM Quintile



Young people who indicated that they were entitled to free school meals were more likely to currently engage in vaping behaviour (22%) than those who were not entitled to free school meals (13%).

As illustrated in Figure 16, prevalence of current use is noticeably higher among those who reported having skipped or cut class over the last month in comparison to those who did not skip or cut class, with prevalence increasing with the number of days pupils reported having skipped class. Prevalence ranged from 11% among those who had never skipped a class to 65% among those who had skipped class on 7 or more days.

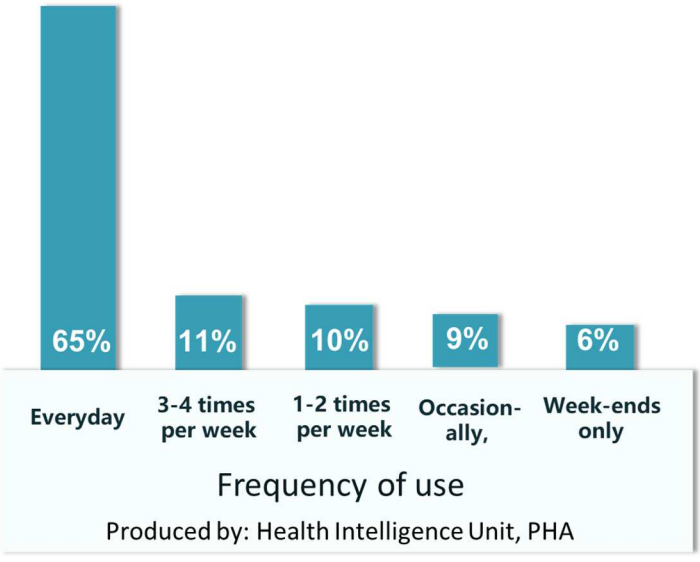
Figure 16: Prevalence of current vape use by number of days a pupil had skipped class (during the last 30 days)



Frequency of use

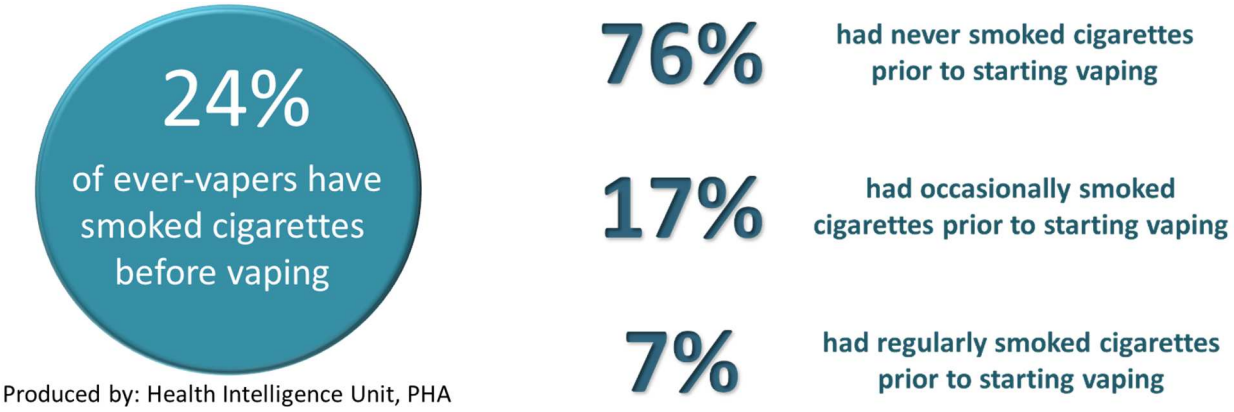
Among regular users (8%), approximately two thirds reported using vapes 'everyday' (65%), with 11% using vapes 3-4 times per week (Figure 17). One in ten reported using vapes 1-2 times per week, with 9% reporting that they used them occasionally but not every day. A small proportion reported that they only used vapes on the weekend (9%).

Figure 17: Frequency of vape use among regular users (%) (n=594)



Smoking behaviour before uptake of vaping

The majority of ever-vapers (76%) reported that they had never smoked tobacco cigarettes before they had tried an e-cigarette for the first time (76%), with 7% reporting that they had been regularly using cigarettes.



Among ever-vapers, a higher proportion of males had been regularly or occasionally using cigarettes before using vapes compared to females (27% and 23% respectively). Eleven percent of males in comparison to 5% females had been regularly smoking cigarettes prior to having tried/using for the first time.

Those living in the most deprived areas were more likely to have been occasionally or regularly smoking cigarettes before using vapes than those living in the least deprived areas, with proportions decreasing through the quintiles ranging from 28% in Q1 to 20% in Q2.

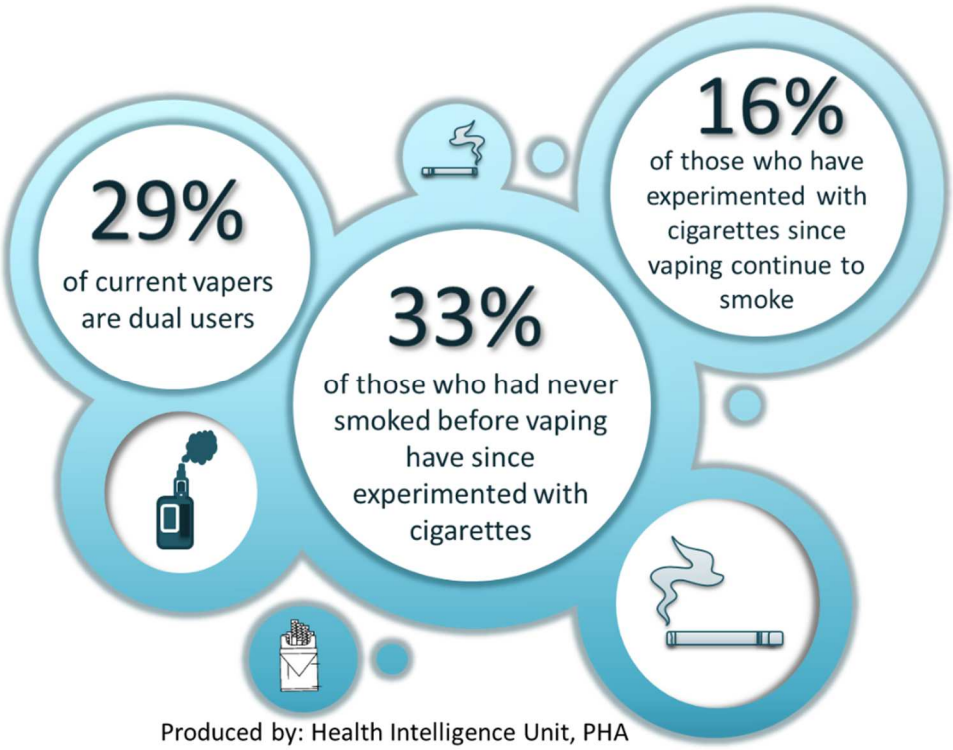
There was a notable difference in the proportions of ever-vapers who had been regular or occasional smokers before having used vapes across school Year Groups. Those in the lower Year Groups were least likely to have ever smoked a cigarette before trying/using a vape, with proportions increasing through the Year Groups ranging from 13% among those in Year 8 to 30% among those in Year 14.

Those who indicated that they were entitled to free school meals were considerably more likely to have been regular/occasional smokers prior to having used vapes than those who did not receive free school meals (33% and 20% respectively).

Smoking behaviour after uptake of vaping

Of those ever-vapers who had indicated not having smoked before using vapes, 33% have since experimented with smoking tobacco cigarettes (equating to 3% of all ever-vapers), with 16% continuing to smoke (current smokers). Overall, 29% of current vapers also smoke cigarettes (dual users) (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Cigarette use after uptake of vaping (%) (n=941)

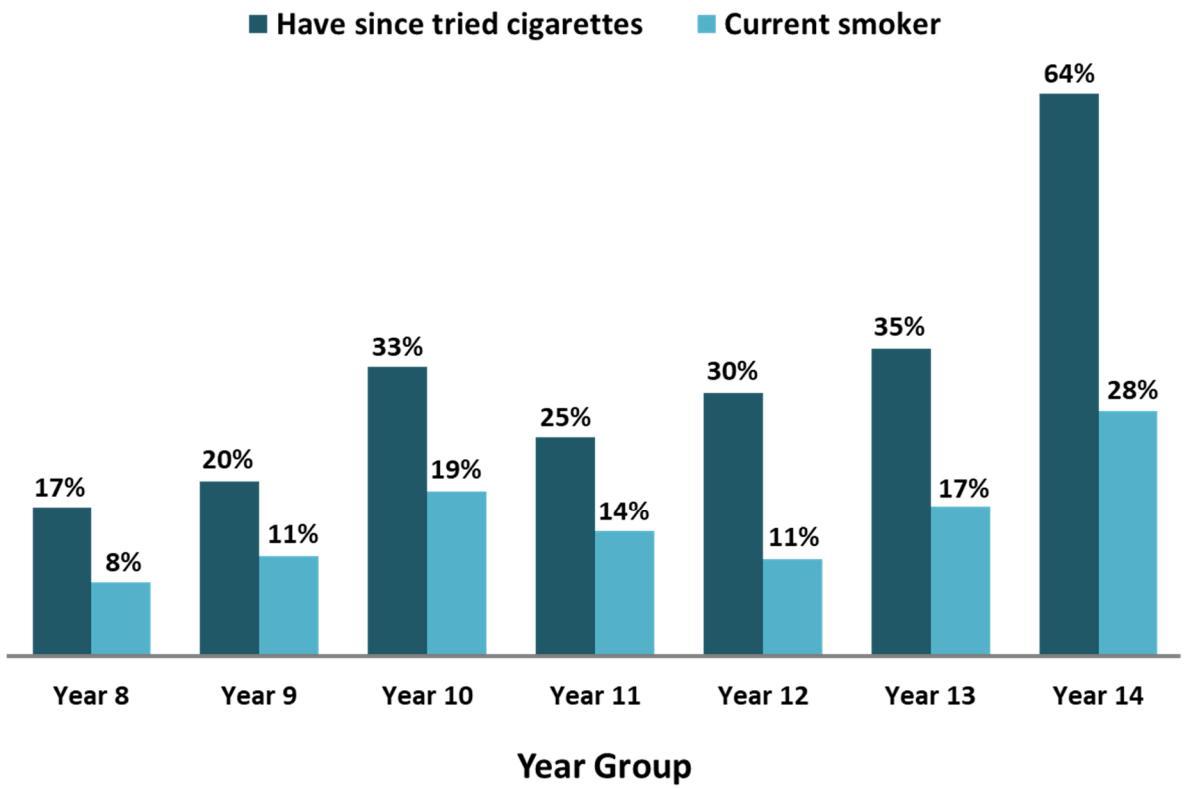


On further analysis of those who had never smoked a cigarette prior to using a vape by key demographic groups, a slightly higher proportion of males had since experimented with cigarettes than females (34% and 31% respectively), with 18% of males and 15% females continuing to smoke.

Those living in the most deprived areas were less likely to have engaged in smoking cigarettes since starting to vape (Q1 30%, Q2 28%) compared to those living in quintiles 3 and 4 (Q3 37%, Q4 37%). The proportion who continue to smoke cigarettes is also higher among those living in Q3 and Q4 (18% and 22% respectively) compared to those in the most deprived quintiles (Q1 14%, Q2 12%). However, difference in proportions may be reflective of the fact that a higher proportion of those living in the most deprived area were regular smokers prior to uptake of vapes.

There was a considerable difference in proportions who had since experimented with cigarettes since first using a vape across Year Groups ranging from 17% among those in Year 8 to 64% of those in Year 14. Proportions increased through the Year Groups with the exception of those in Year 10 were a higher proportion had experimented with cigarettes compared to those in Years 11 and 12. Year 10 also had the second highest proportion who still engage in smoking (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Proportion of those who had never smoked a cigarette before vaping who have since smoked a cigarette and proportion who continue to smoke by Year Group (%) (n=941)



If used other nicotine products

In general, a small minority of young people had used other nicotine products such as water pipe/shisha (2%), moist snuff/snus (2%) and heat-not-burn-tobacco (1%). On further analysis by vaping status, those who were current vapers or past users were most likely to have used these products in comparison to never-vapers among whom there were no reports of use.

Perceived vape use among friends

All participants were asked to give an estimation (from a scale of five options) of how many of their friends vape. Overall, 60% of young people indicated that they had at least one friend who vaped, with 26% indicating that about 50% or more of their friends vape.

Figure 20: Estimated vape use among friends (%) (n=7,581)

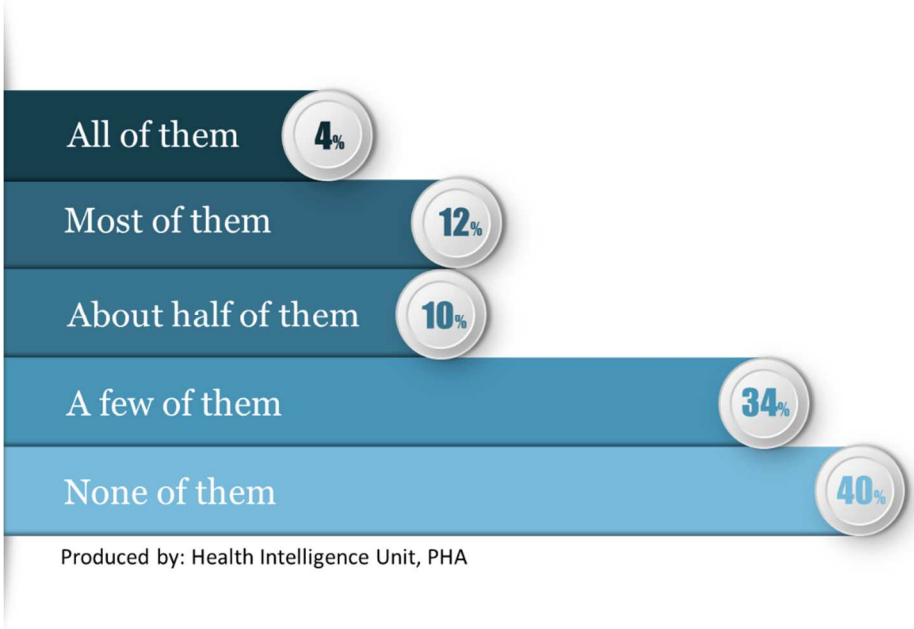
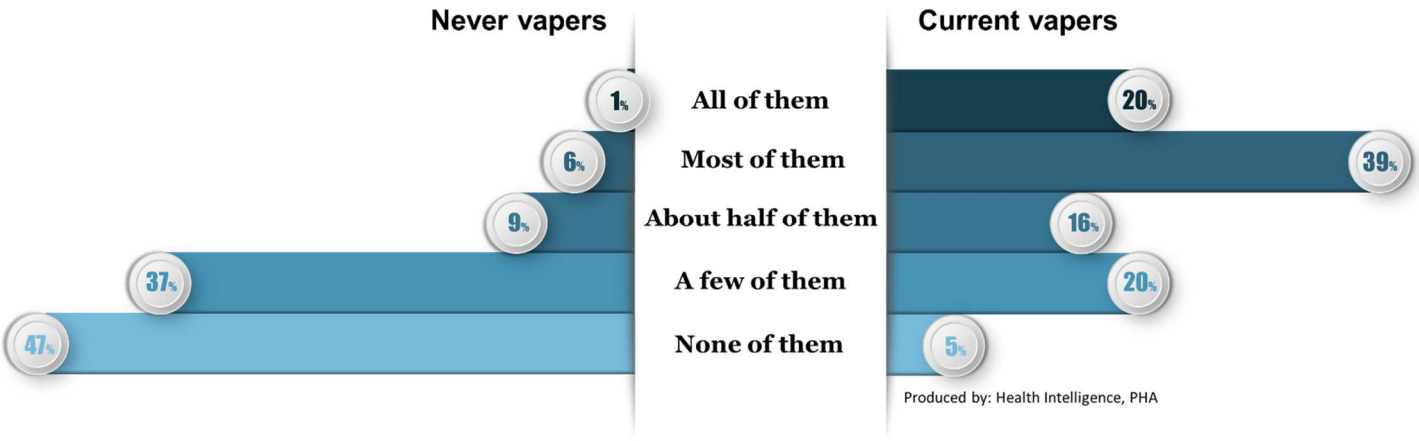


Figure 21 highlights that there was a notable difference of those who had friends who vaped by vaping status, with those who currently vape being considerably more likely to have at least one friend who vapes (95%) in comparison to young people who have never-vaped (53%). Of interest, 59% of current vapers indicated that most or all of their friends vape compared to 7% of never-vapers.

Figure 21: Estimated vape use among friends by vaping status (%) (n=7,208)



A slightly higher proportions of females indicated that they had at least one friend who vapes (63%) than males (57%), with 29% of females and 23% of males having approximately 50% or more of their friends who vape.

Participants in the lower school year groups were least likely to have friends who vape, with 61% of those in Year 8 indicating that none of their friends use vapes compared to 9% of those in Year 14. The proportion of participants who indicated that their friends did not vape gradually decreased through the Year Groups as illustrated in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Perceived prevalence of current vape use of friends by Year Group (%)

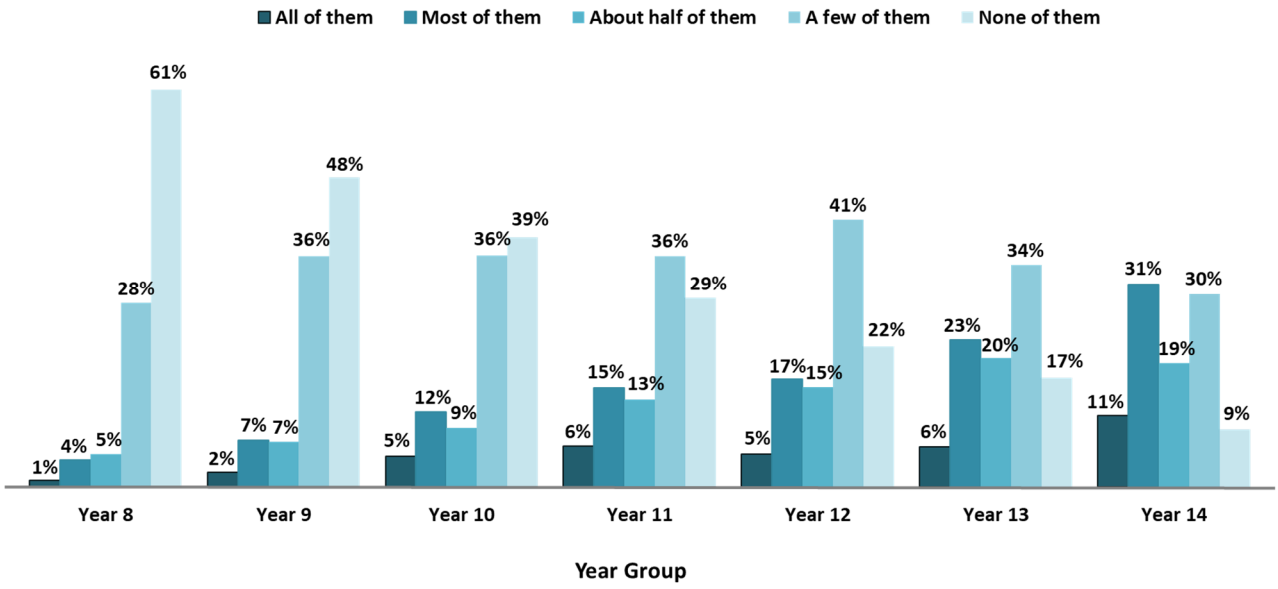
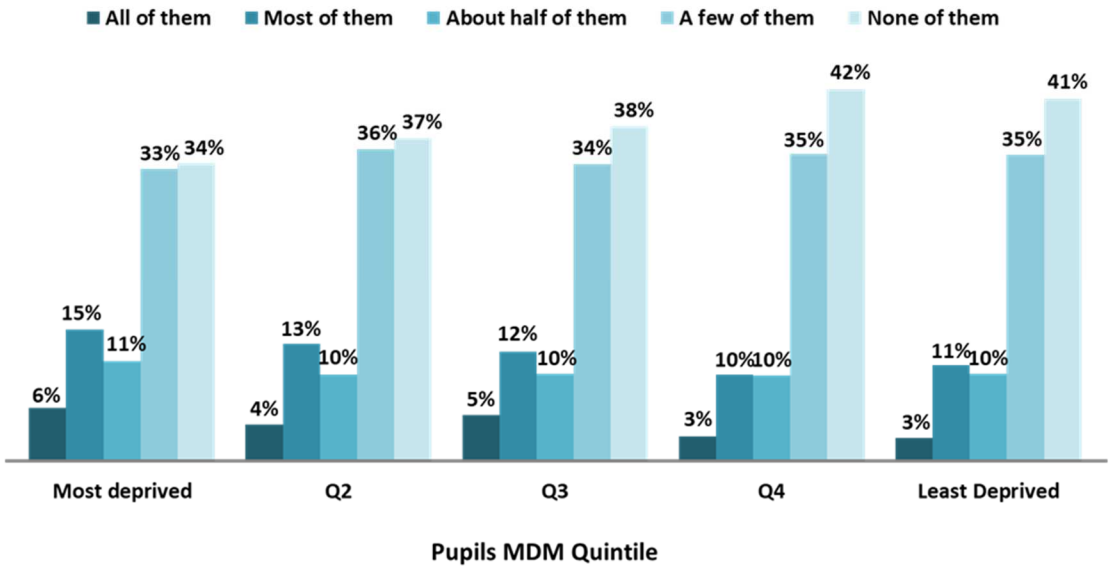


Figure 23 highlights that participants living in the most deprived area were more likely to have at least one friend who vaped compared to those living in the least deprived area (66% and 59% respectively), with 1 in 5 of those living in the most deprived quintile (21%) indicating that most or all of their friends vape in comparison to 14% among those living in the least deprived quintile.

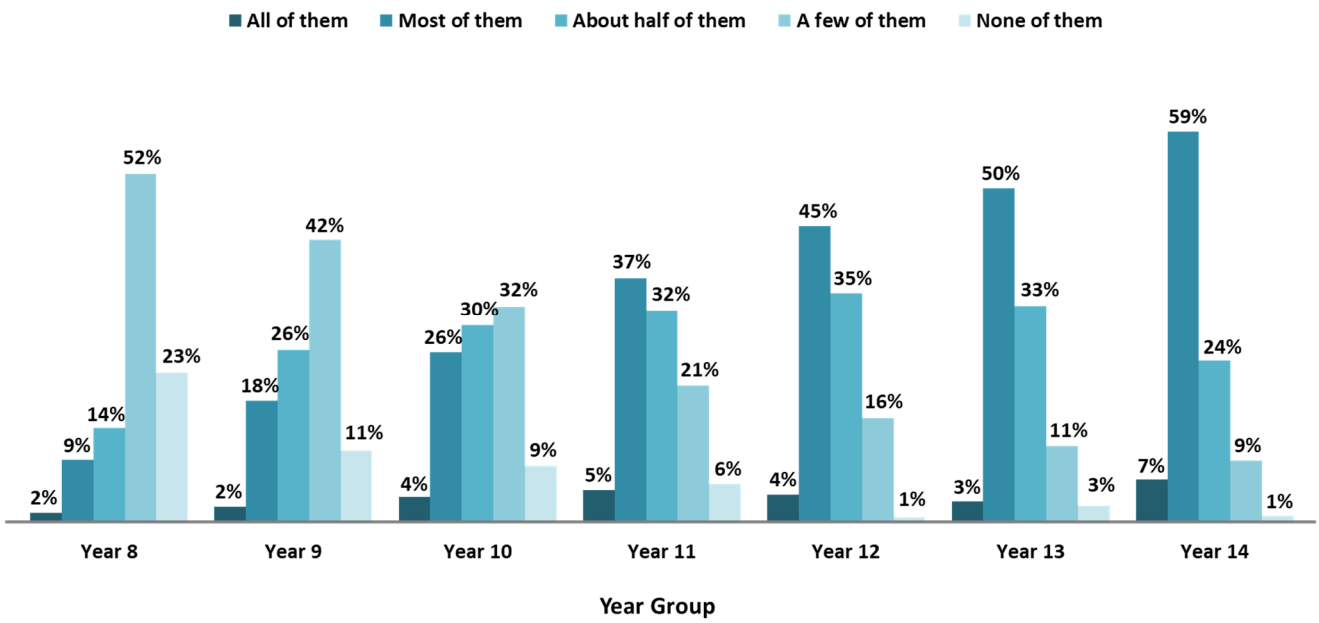
Figure 23: Perceived prevalence of current vape use among friends by Pupils MDM Quintile (%)



Perceived vape use among year group

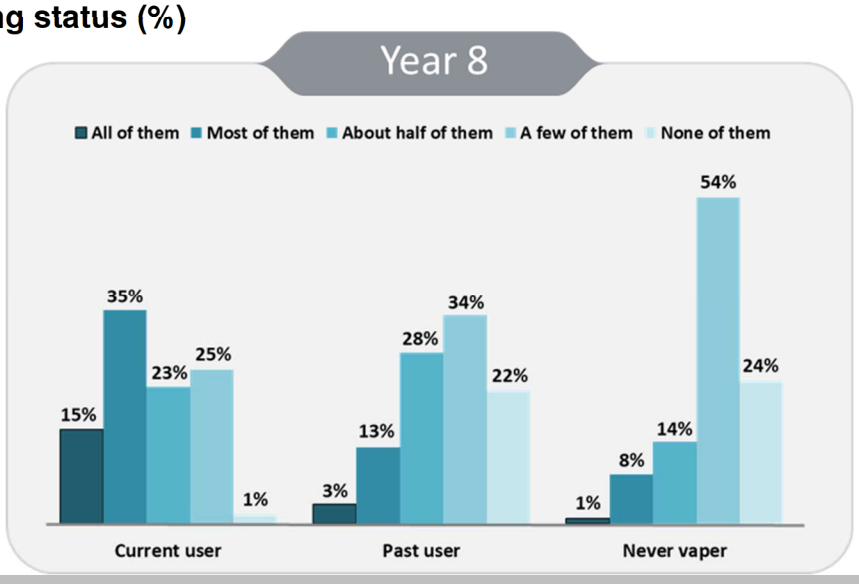
When asked to estimate how many pupils vape within their school year group, those in the lower year groups perceived vaping to be less prevalent among their peers compared to those in the higher year groups (Figure 24). Perceived prevalence of vape use among peers increased through the year groups, which was akin to the pattern of current vape use among participants.

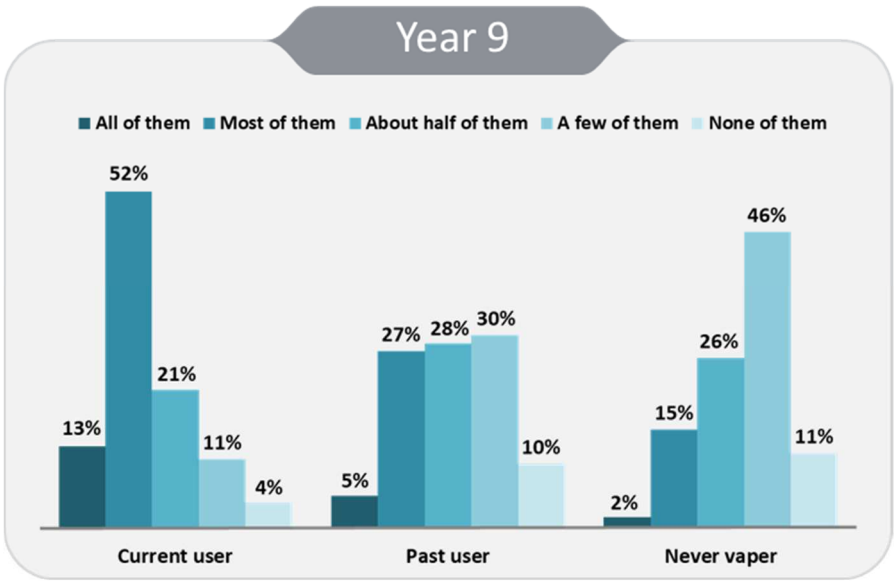
Figure 24: Perceived prevalence of current vape use among peers by Pupils Year Group (%)

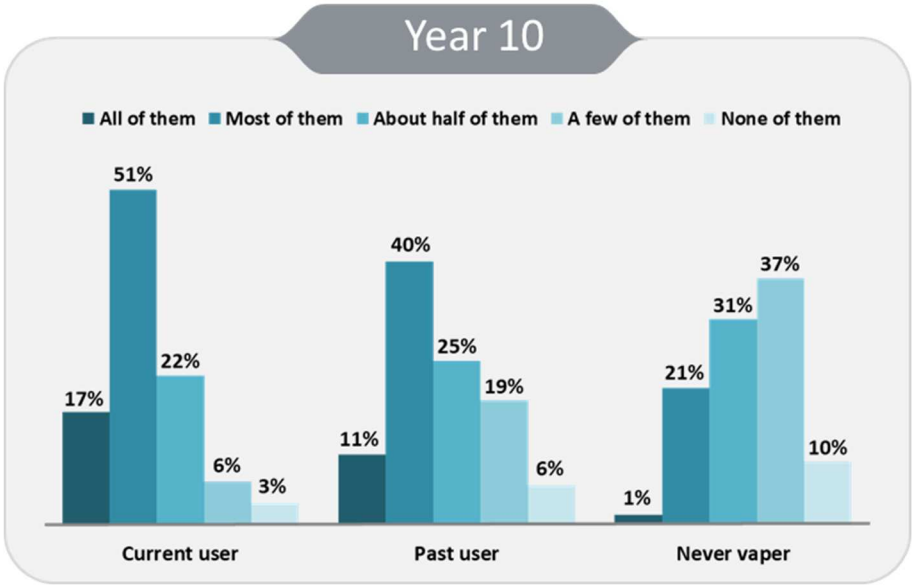


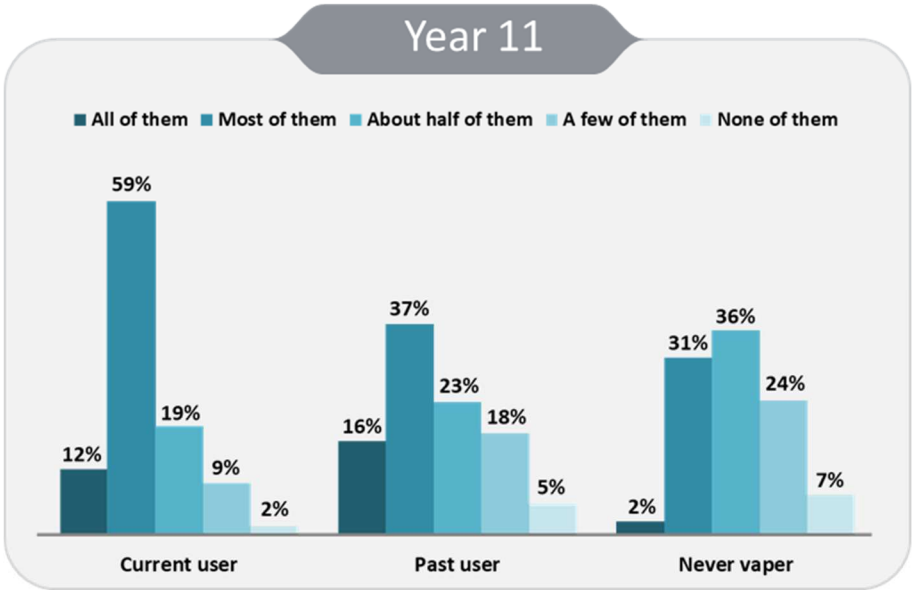
There was a considerable difference across all year groups in perceptions of vaping use among peers, by those who currently vape and those who had never vaped (Figure 25), with current vapers being more likely to report a higher prevalence of vaping among their peers.

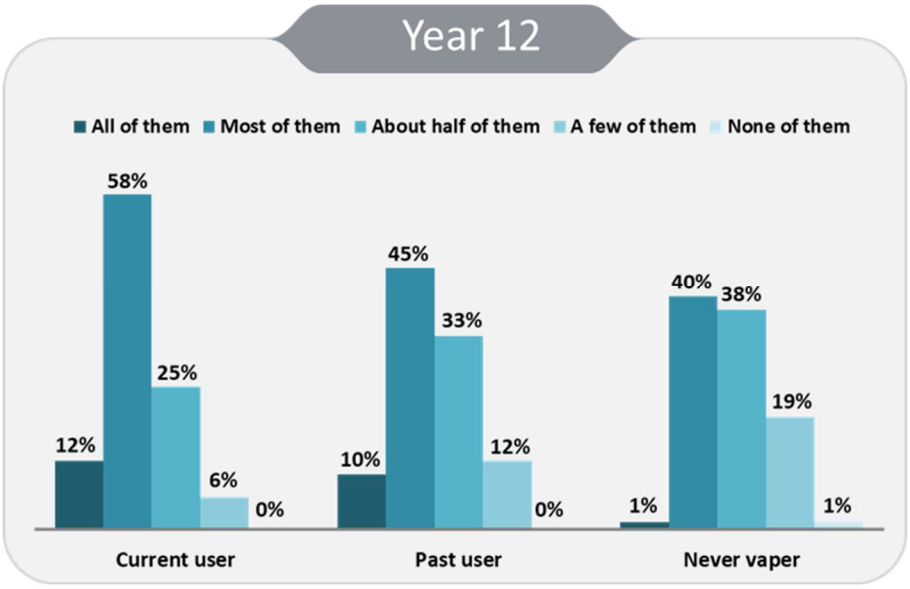
Figure 25: Perceived prevalence of current vape use among peers by Pupils Year Group and vaping status (%)

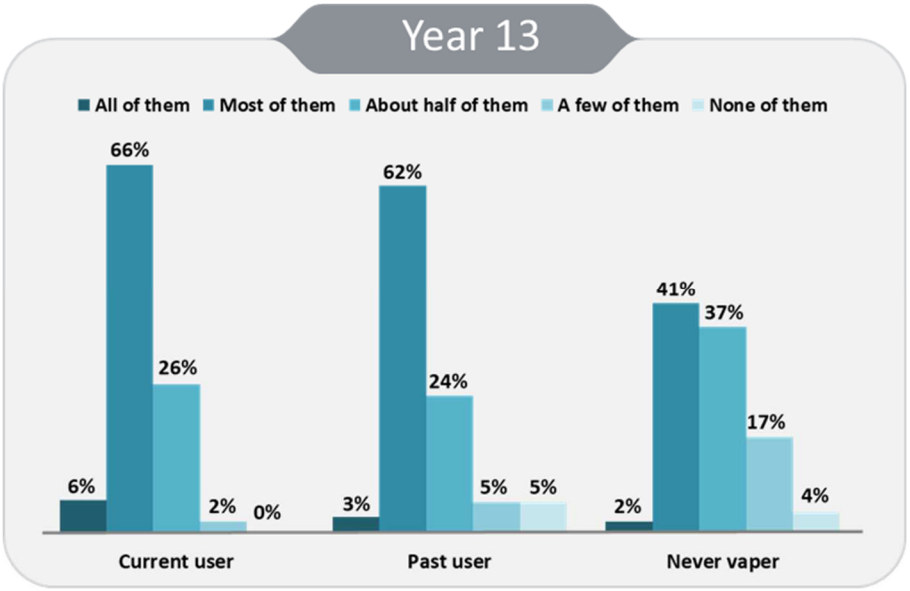


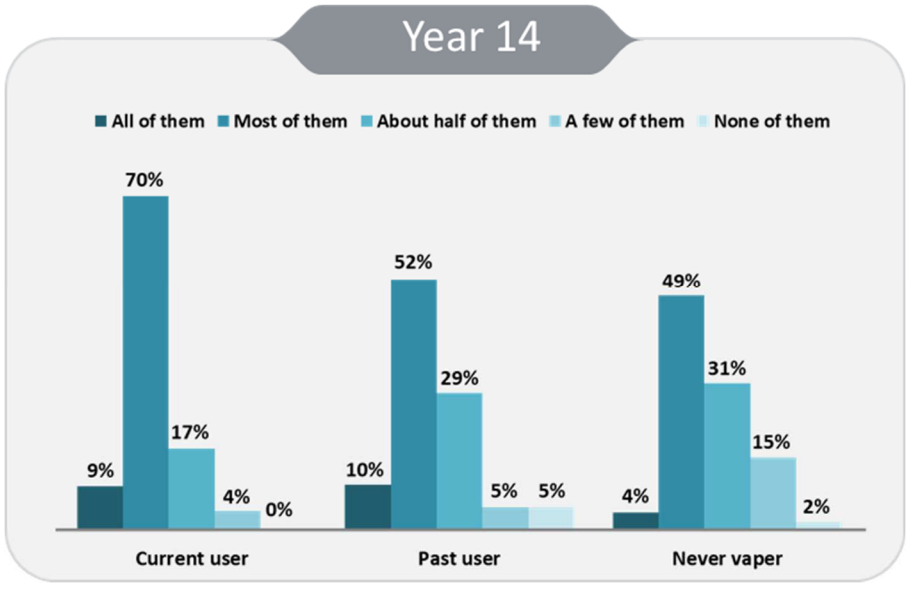

Year 9
All of them
Most of them
About half of them
A few of them
None of them
52%
21%
13%
11%
4%
27%
28%
30%
5%
10%
46%
26%
15%
11%
2%
Current user
Past user
Never vaper


Year 10
All of them
Most of them
About half of them
A few of them
None of them
51%
22%
17%
6%
3%
40%
25%
19%
11%
6%
37%
31%
21%
10%
1%
Current user
Past user
Never vaper


Year 11
All of them
Most of them
About half of them
A few of them
None of them
59%
19%
12%
9%
2%
37%
23%
18%
16%
5%
36%
31%
24%
2%
7%
Current user
Past user
Never vaper


Year 12
All of them
Most of them
About half of them
A few of them
None of them
58%
25%
12%
6%
0%
45%
33%
10%
12%
0%
40%
38%
19%
1%
1%
Current user
Past user
Never vaper


Year 13
All of them
Most of them
About half of them
A few of them
None of them
66%
26%
6%
2%
0%
62%
24%
3%
5%
5%
41%
37%
17%
2%
4%
Current user
Past user
Never vaper


Year 14
All of them
Most of them
About half of them
A few of them
None of them
70%
17%
9%
4%
0%
52%
29%
10%
5%
5%
49%
31%
15%
4%
2%
Current user
Past user
Never vaper

Family vaping status

Just over a third of young people (36%) reported having an immediate family member who had ever used a vaped, with vaping status shown in Figure 26.

Figure 26: Prevalence of vape use among immediate family members (%)

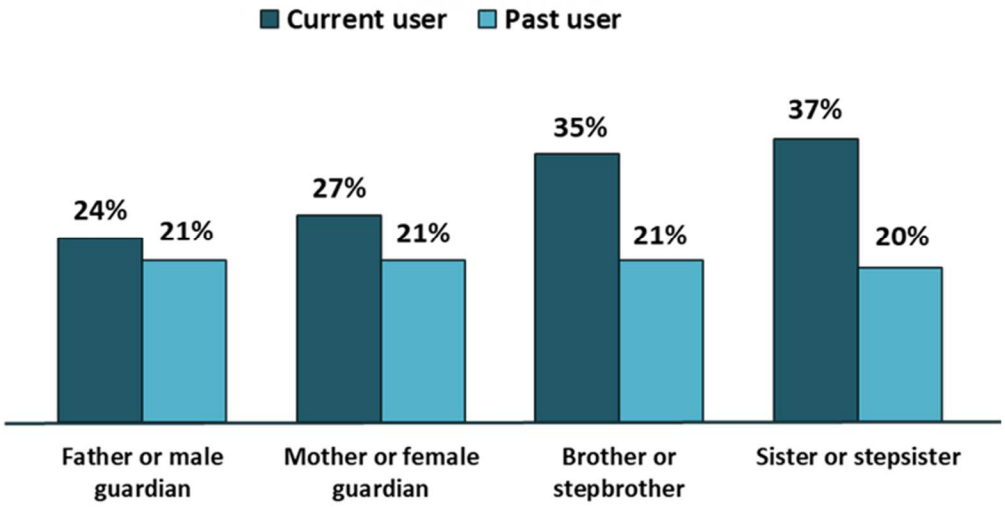
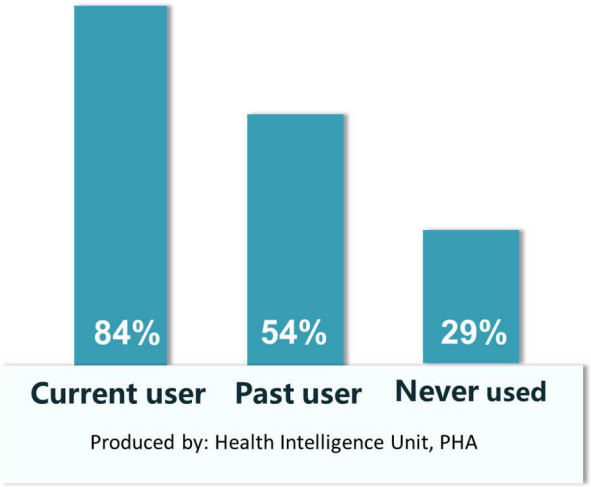


Figure 27 highlights that young people who have ever used a vape are more likely to have an immediate family member who had ever used a vape in comparison to those who have never vaped.

Figure 27: Proportion of immediate family members who have ever used a vape by young persons current vaping status (%)

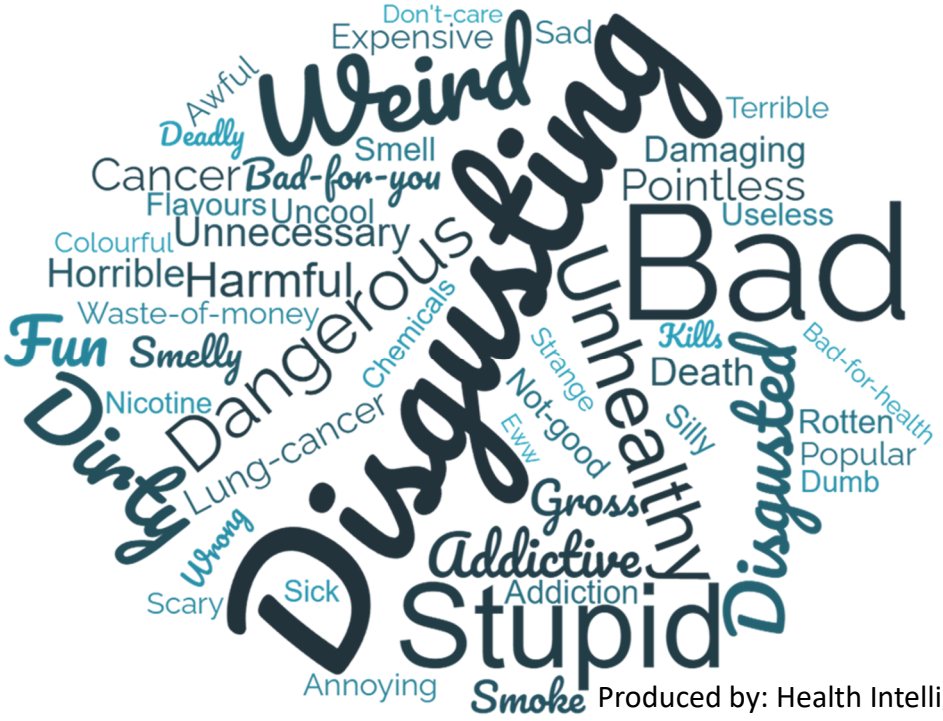


How young people feel about vaping

Young people were asked to assign words that would depict how they felt about vaping. The diagrams below give an indication of the most prominent word associations given by vaping status.

Never vapers

Among young people who have never used a vape the word associations are negative, with 'disgusting', 'bad', 'unhealthy', 'dangerous', 'stupid' and 'addictive' being the most common.



Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

Regular users

Word associations are mainly positive among young people who regularly vape, with ‘fun’, ‘relaxing’, ‘flavours’, ‘nice’, ‘cool’ and ‘addictive’ being the most common.

Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

Occasional and Experimental vapers

For young people you only use vapes occasionally word associations would be mainly of a negative sentiment, with ‘unhealthy’, ‘bad’, ‘addictive’, ‘dangerous’, ‘disgusting’ and ‘popular’ being the most commonly stated.

Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

Past users

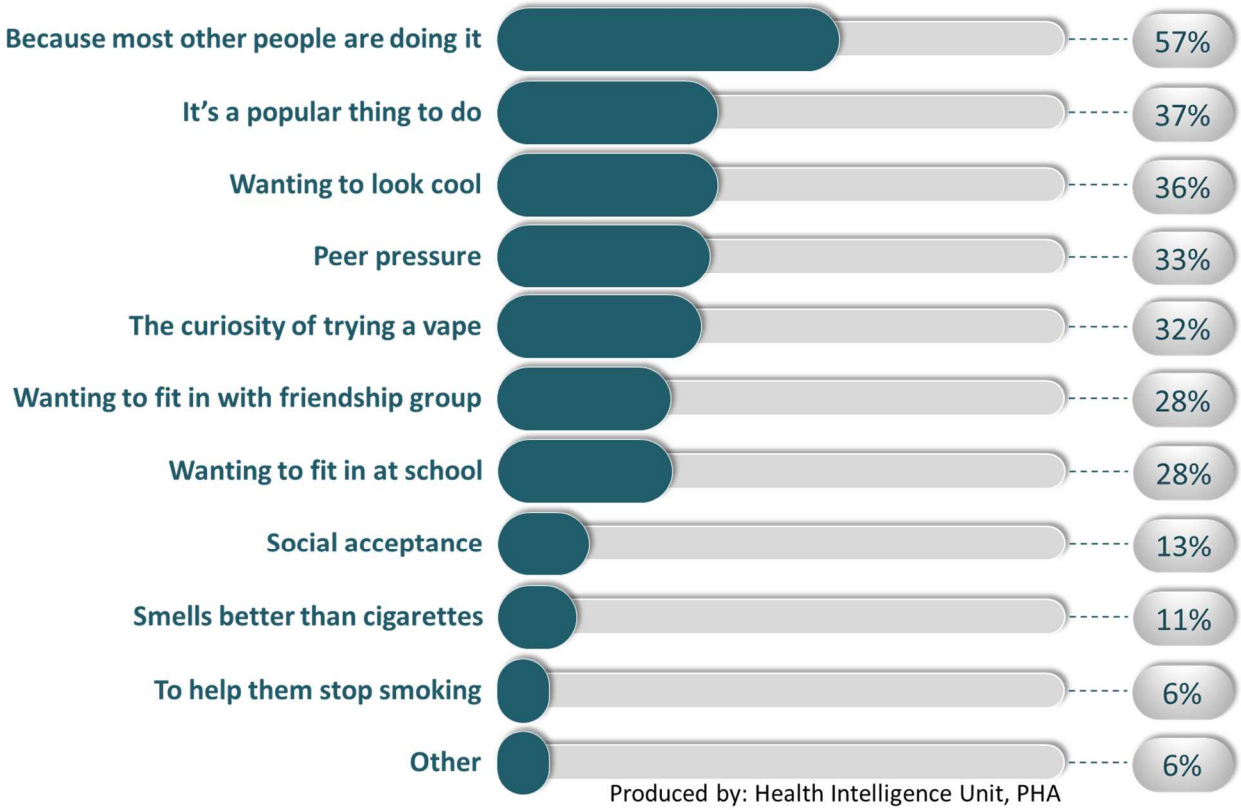
Among young people who no longer vape word associations were mainly negative, with ‘bad, ‘unhealthy’, ‘disgusting’, ‘stupid’, ‘addictive’ and ‘dangerous’ being the most dominant.

Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

Why young people choose to vape

When asked to choose from a list of options as to why they thought young people choose to vape, the top three most common reasons given were *‘because most other people are doing it’* (57%), followed by *‘it’s a popular thing to do’* (37%) and *‘wanting to look cool’* (36%). (Please refer to Figure 28 below). Of those who stated *‘other’*, the majority (34%, n=156) indicated that young people may vape as ‘*a coping mechanism’* as they are perceived as a means to relieve stress and to help cope with depression, anxiety and trauma as the following quotes suggests.

Figure 28: Why young people choose to vape % (multiple response, n=7,518)



On further analysis by vaping status, 'because most other people are doing it' was the most common reason perceived as to why young people choose to vape across groups. However, there was variance in the order thereafter. The second most common reason among those who had never vaped was 'because they wanted to look cool', followed by 'it's a popular thing to do'. Whereas, among current vapers it was 'the curiosity of trying a vape', followed by 'it's a popular thing to do'. The second most common reason among past vapers was also 'the curiosity of trying a vape', with 'wanting to look cool' being the third most common reason, as illustrated in Figure 29.

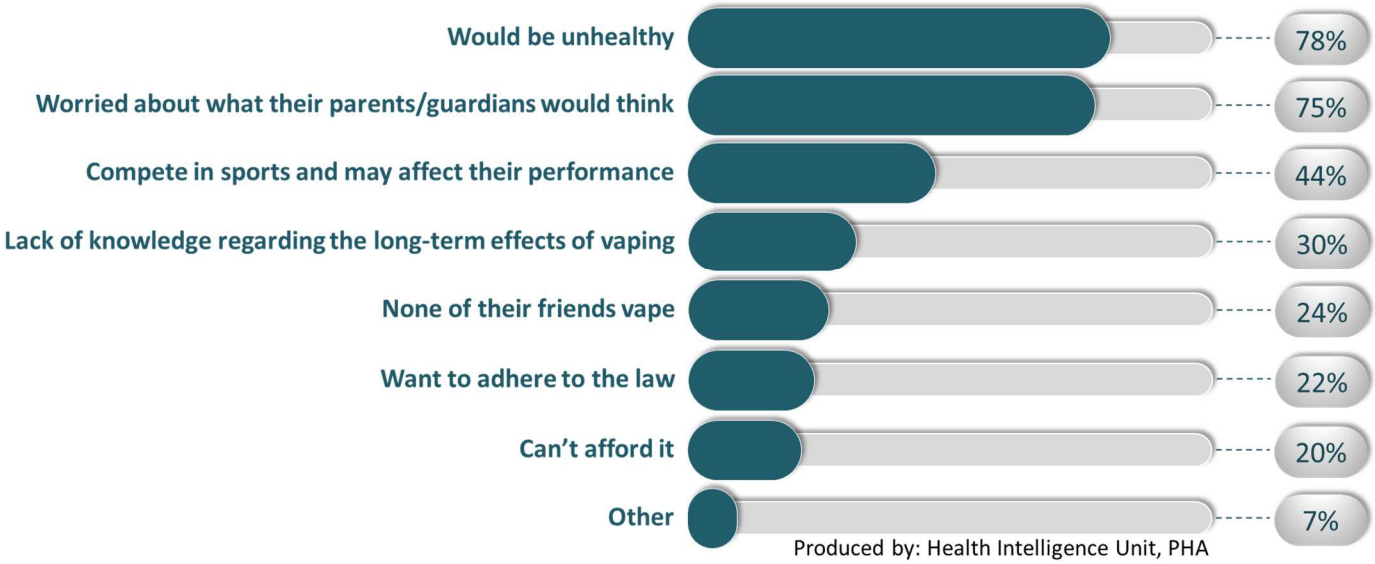
Figure 29: Top five most common reasons as to why young people choose to vape by vaping status % (multiple response).

Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

Why young people choose not to vape

Figure 30 highlights that the vast majority of young people thought young people choose not to vape because it is unhealthy (78%), followed by because they would be worried about what their parents/guardians would think (75%). Forty-four percent indicated that some may compete in sports and vaping may therefore affect their performance. Being able not to afford them was the least common response (20%). Of the small minority who also indicated 'other' (7%, n=539), 'because they don't want to' and 'because they don't want to get addicted' were the most common responses.

Figure 30: Why young people choose not to vape % (multiple response, n=7,518)



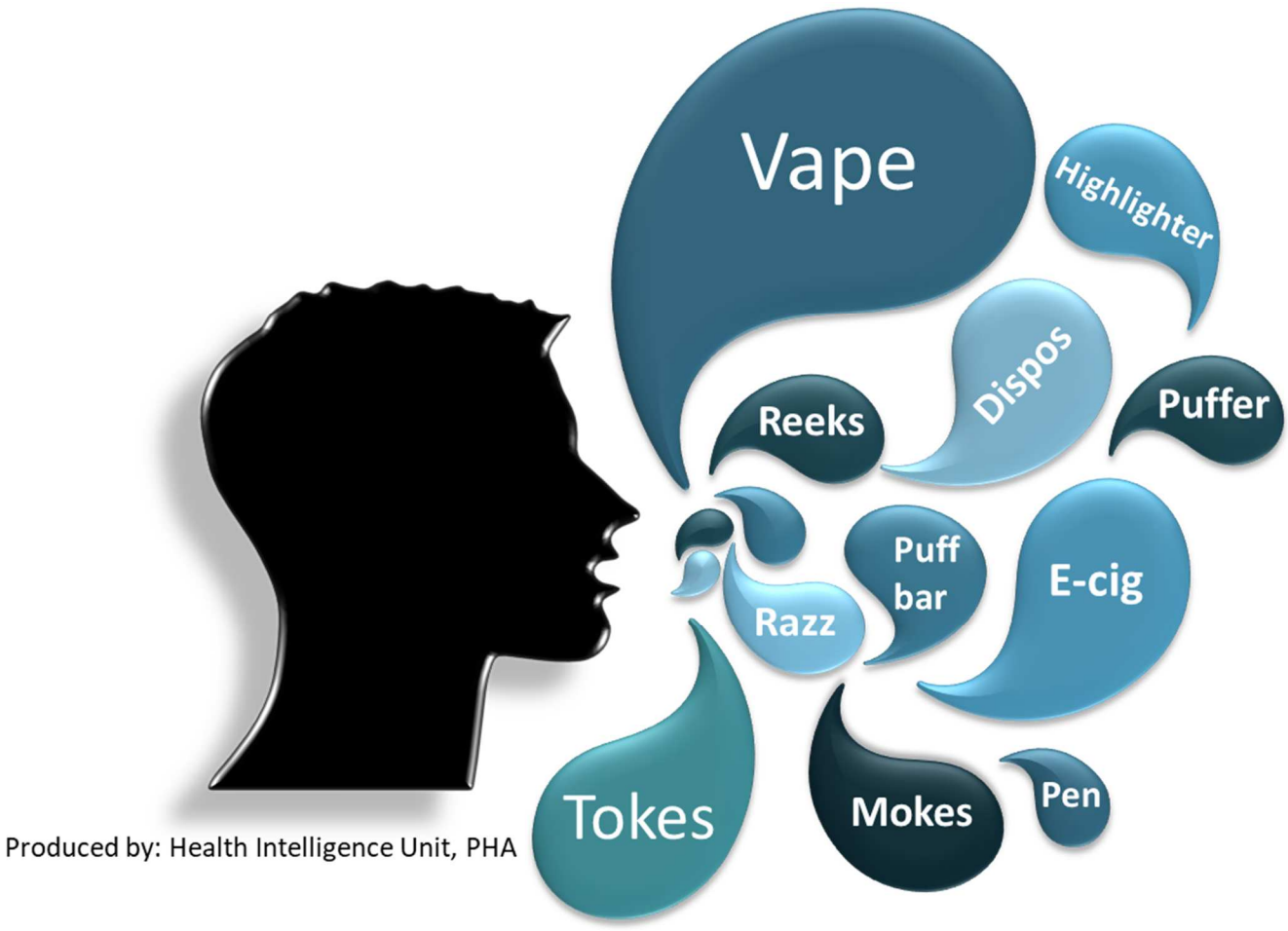
When analysed by vaping status, the three most common responses were similar across groups. Cost was the fourth most common reason for both current and past users, with 'none of their friends vape' being the fifth most common reason among both never and current users (please refer to Figure 31).

Figure 31: Top five most common reasons as to why young people choose not to vape by vaping status % (multiple response).

Produced by: Health Intelligence, PHA

Common names for e-cigarettes

E-cigarettes are known by many different names such as ENDS, tanks and mods and often young people use slang names. When asked what they and their friends call e-cigarettes the most common names used by young people are ‘Vapes’ (61%) followed by ‘Tokes’ (13%). Other names included ‘e-cigs’ (6%) and ‘Dispos‘ (4 %).



Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

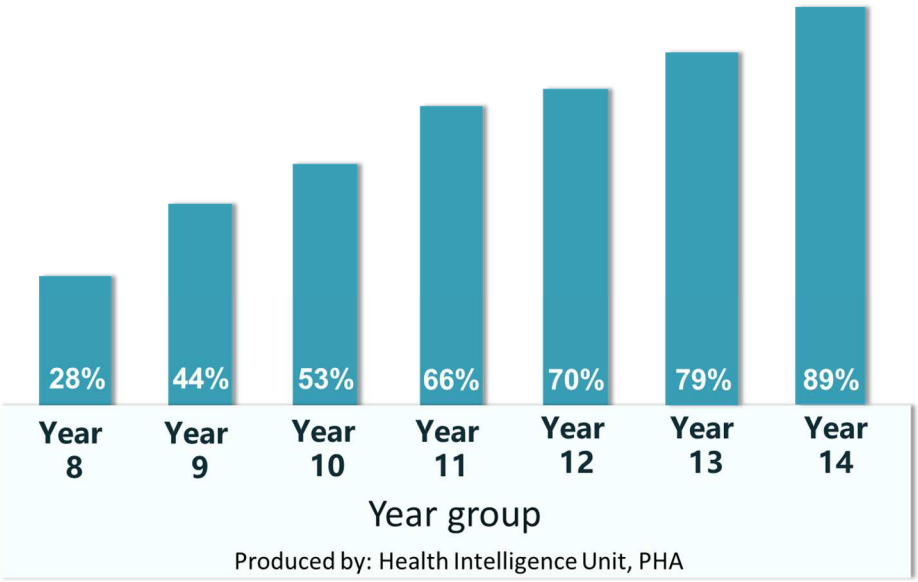
Resilience to say no

As vape use is becoming increasingly common among young people it is very likely that a young person will find themselves in a situation where they will be offered a vape by friends or other associates.

Ever been offered a vape to try

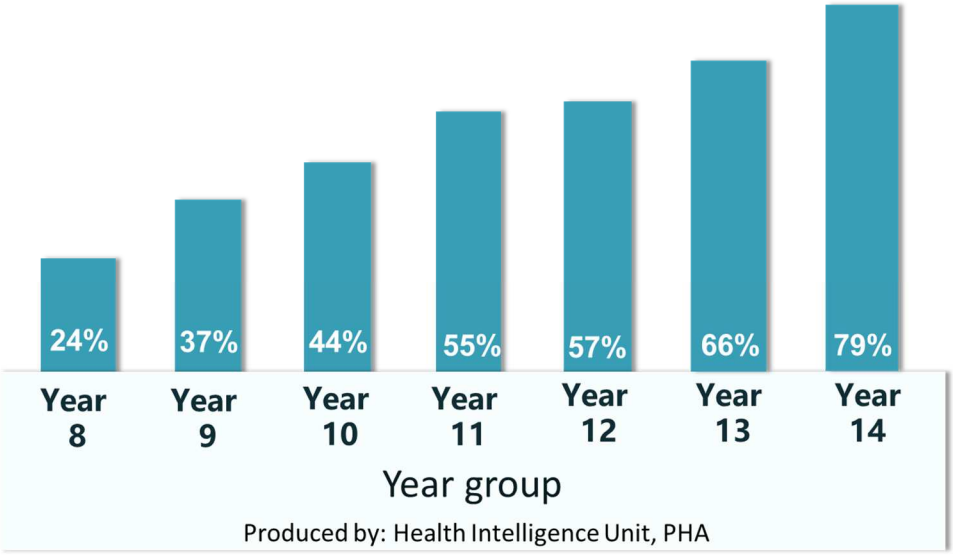
Just over half of respondents reported that someone had offered them a vape to try (53%). Young people in the upper Year Groups were considerably more likely to have been offered a vape compared to those in the lower Year Groups with proportions increasing through the year groups, ranging from 28% among those in Year 8 to 89% among those in Year 14 (Figure 32).

Figure 32: Proportion offered a vape to try by Year Group % (n=7,559)



Just over 2 in 5 never-vapers had someone offer them a vape (42%), with proportions increasing by Year Group, ranging from 24% in Year 8 to 79% in Year 14 (Figure 33).

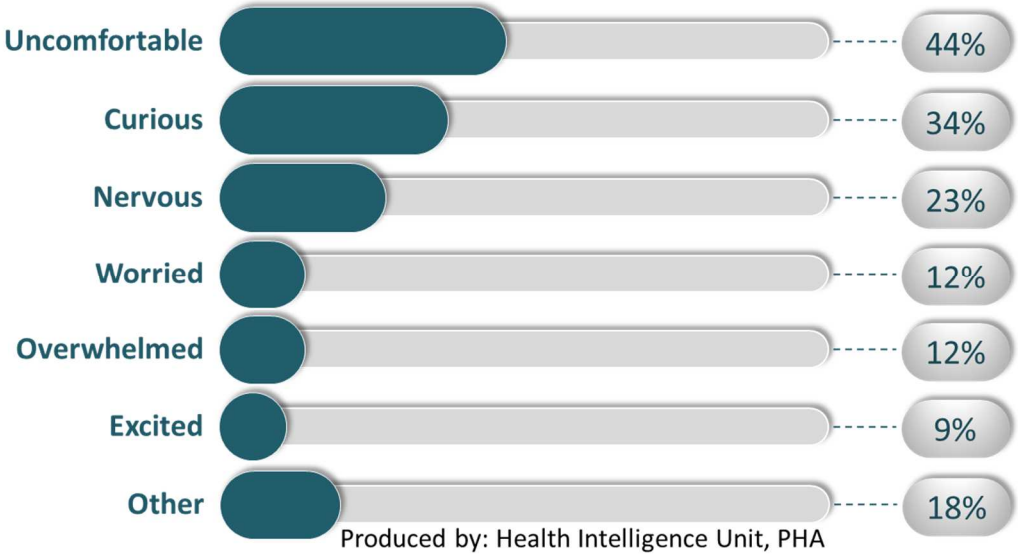
Figure 33: Proportion of never-vapers offered a vape to try by Year Group % (n=6,086)



Feelings when offered a vape

When asked how they felt the first time they had been offered a vape, just over 2 in 5 indicated having felt uncomfortable (44%), 34% indicated being curious (Figure 34). A small proportion indicated having felt excited when offered the vape (9%). Of those who had stated other, the most common response was that they 'didn't really care' (24%), with 10% stating they had been unbothered by it or having felt nothing (10%).

Figure 34: Feelings about being offered a vape % (multiple response, n=4,013)



By vaping status, those who had never vaped were considerably more likely to indicate that they had felt uncomfortable when first offered a vape to try (61%) compared to those who were current users (10%) or past users (25%). Whereas, current smokers were most likely to indicate that they had felt curious (71%) in comparison to 16% of never users.

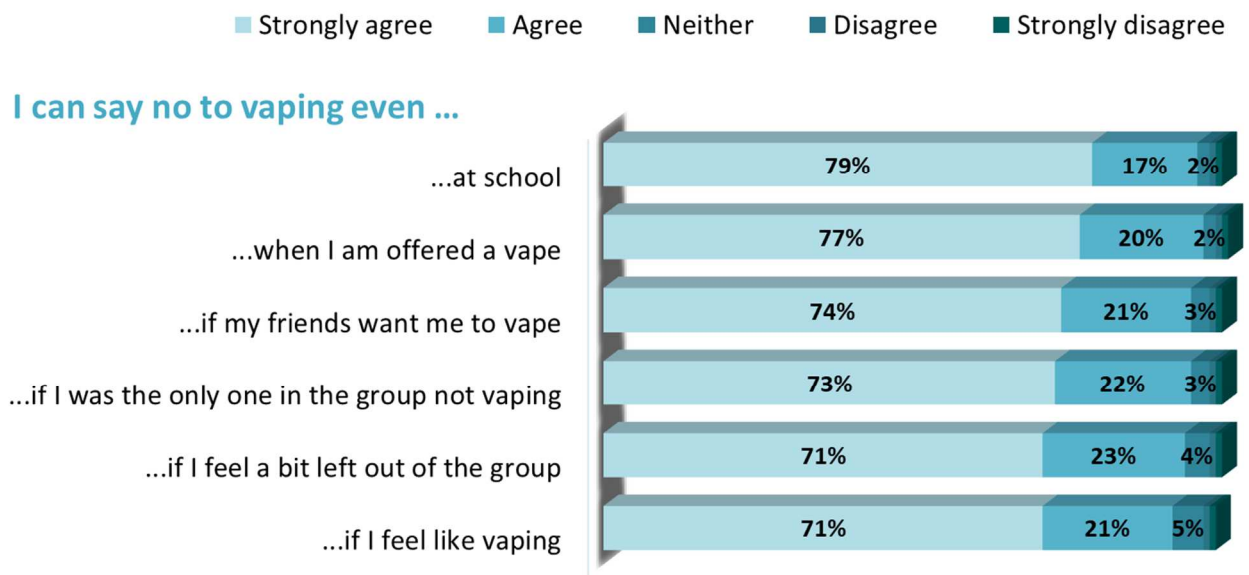
Respondents in the lowest Year Group were most likely to indicate that they felt uncomfortable (60%) with proportions decreasing through the Year Groups to 29% among those in Year 14. However, Year 14 pupils were most likely to indicate that they had felt curious with proportions increasing through the Year Groups, ranging from 25% among Year 8 pupils to 50% of those in Year 14.

Resilience

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements about their resilience to say 'no' when offered a vape to try.

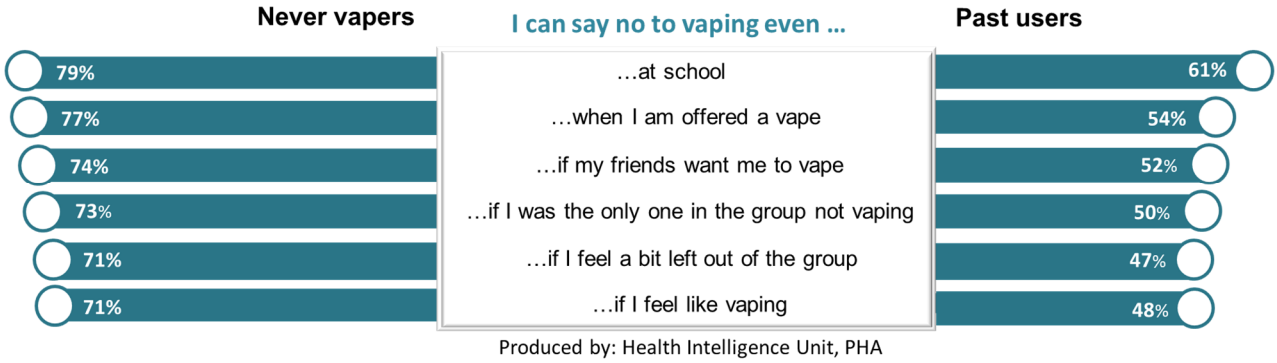
Among those respondents who are never vapers or past users, the majority strongly agreed with the statements in that they would be able to say no to vaping under various situations (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Level of agreement with statements about being able to say no to vaping % (n=6,467)



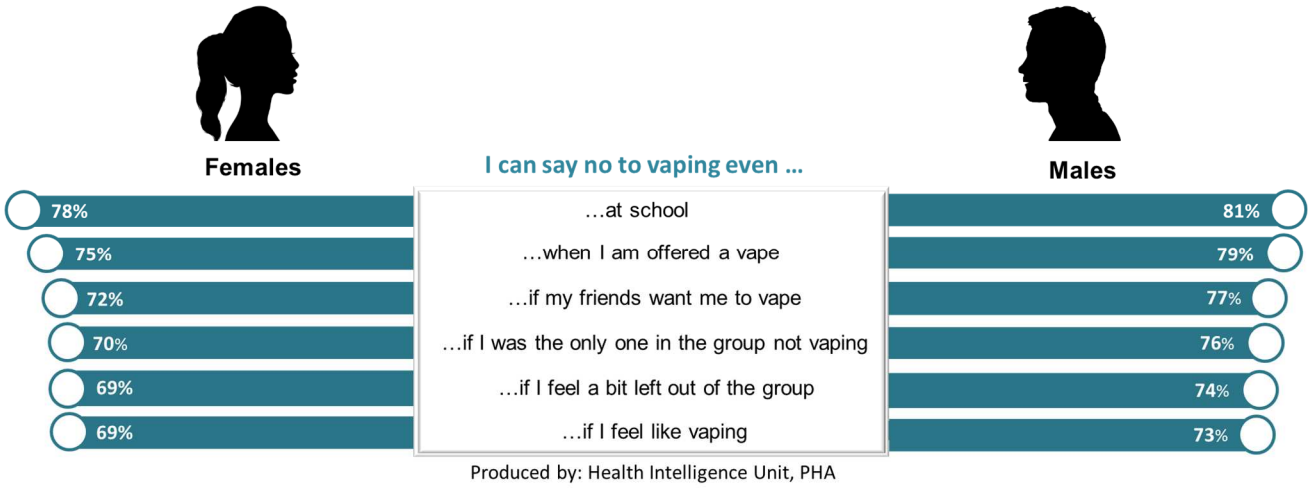
On further analysis of those who do not currently vape by key demographics, never vapers were considerably more likely to be in strong agreement that they could say no to vaping across the different scenarios compared to past users as illustrated in Figure 36.

Figure 36: Proportion in strong agreement with statements about being able to say no to vaping by non-user status % (n=6,467)



Males indicated a slightly higher level of resilience than females, with higher proportions being in strong agreement with the statements compared to females (Figure 37). Levels of strong agreement varied by statement with both males and females showing lower resilience for being able to say no to vaping 'if they felt a bit left out of the group' and 'if they felt like vaping'.

Figure 37: Proportion in strong agreement with statements about being able to say no to vaping by Sex % (n=6,467)



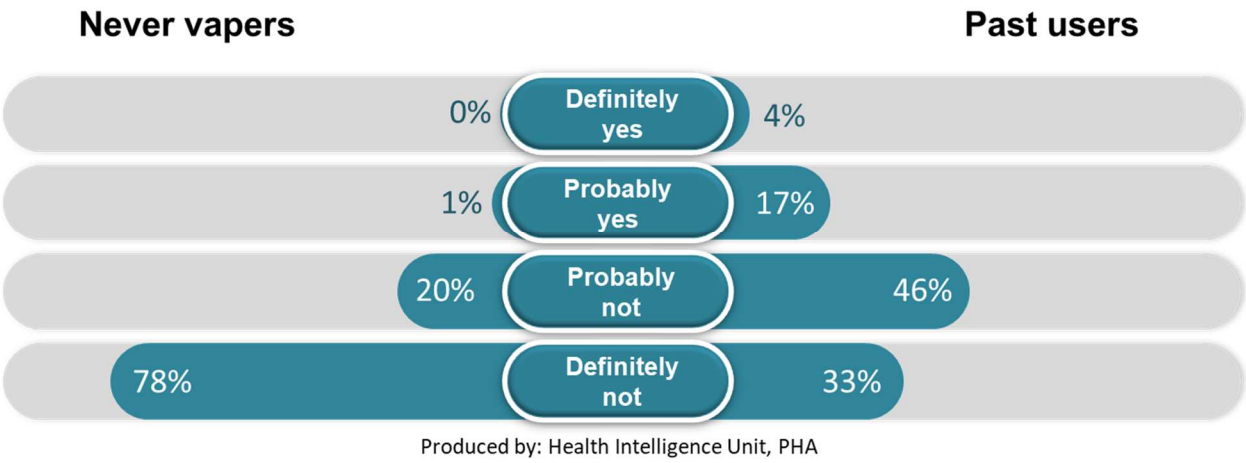
Those in the upper Year Groups were more likely to be in strong agreement with the statements compared to those in the lower Year Groups, with those in Year 10 being the least likely to be in strong agreement across all statements. A notably higher proportion of those in Year 14 and Year 13 (86%) strongly agreed that they could say no to vaping even at school in comparison to those in Year 9 and 10 (78% and 77% respectively). There was also a noticeable difference in the proportion of those in strong agreement that they could say no to vaping even if they feel a bit left out of the group, ranging from 69% among those in Year 9 and Year 10 to 79% among those in Year 13.

Likelihood to try a vape

If would use a vape if offered one by a friend

Never vapers were least likely to use a vape if offered one by a friend, with the vast majority reporting that they would definitely/probably not use it (98%). Whereas, 21% of past users reported that they definitely/probably would use it (Figure 38).

Figure 38: Likelihood of trying a vape if offered one by a friend % (n=6,457)



Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

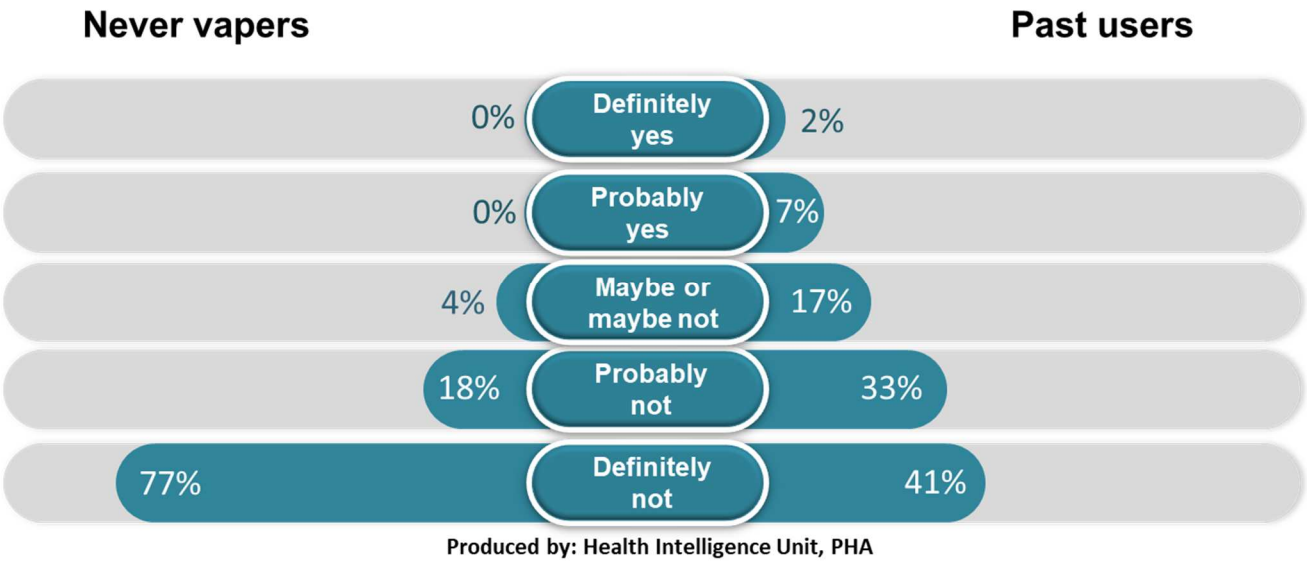
On further analysis by demographics of those respondents who are never vapers or past users, males were more likely than females to report that they definitely would not use a vape if offered one by a friend (78% and 73% respectively). Those living in the least deprived area (Q5, 78%) were more likely to indicate that they definitely would not compared to those in living in the most deprived area (Q1, 75%). Those in Year 8 were least likely to use a vape if offered one by a friend, with the vast majority saying that they definitely would not use a vape if offered one (80%) compared to those in other Year Groups (ranging from 70% in Year 11 to 77% in Year 9).

If would try or use a vape again any time during the next 6 months

The vast majority of never vapers indicated that they probably/definitely would not use a vape within the next 6 months (95%), compared to 74% of past users indicating that they probably/definitely would not use a vape again within the next 6 months. Nine percent of

past users indicated that they definitely/probably would use a vape again, with 17% indicating maybe or maybe not (Figure 39).

Figure 39: Likelihood of trying a vape within the next 6 months % (n=6,457)



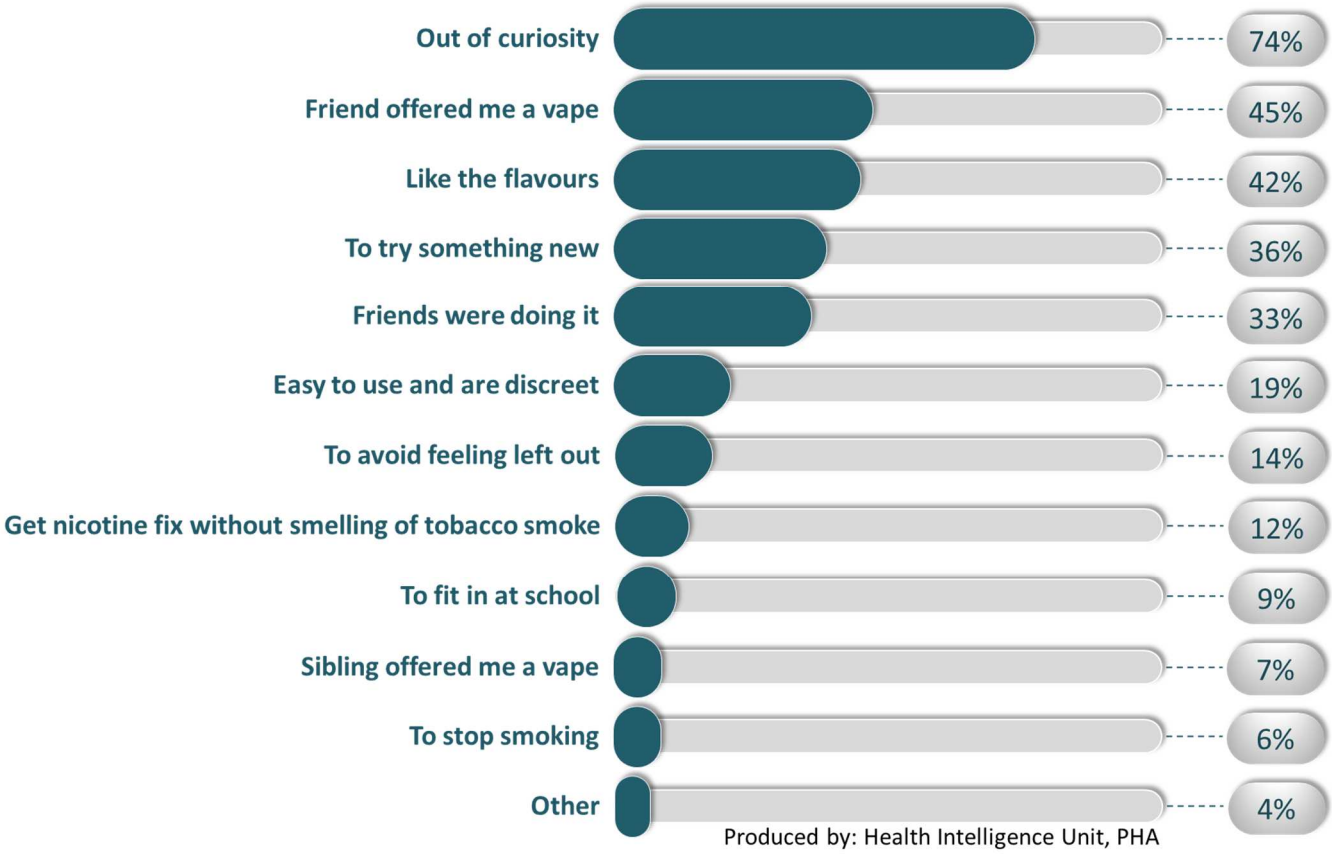
Among those respondents who were past users, females were more likely than males to indicate that they definitely/probably would use a vape again (13% and 4% respectively).

Experiences of vaping

Trying a vape for the first time

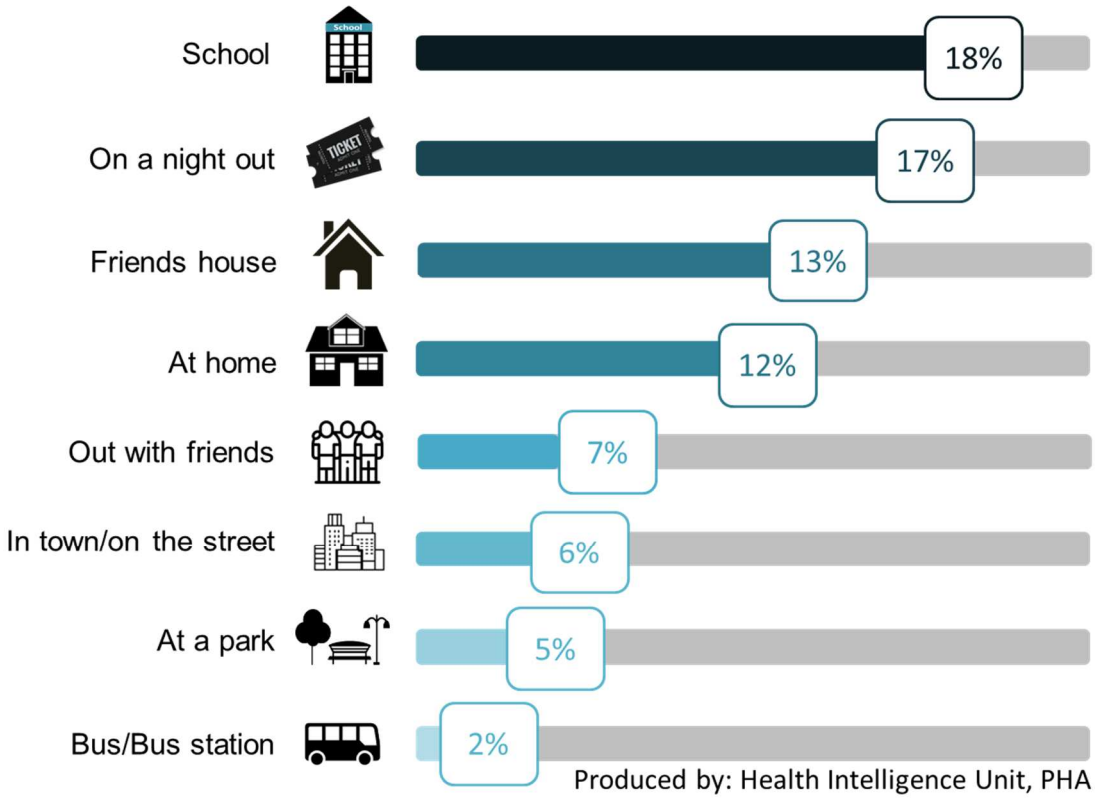
Among those participants who had ever-used a vape, a variety of reasons were given for having tried a vape (Figure 40). The most common reason was out of curiosity (74%), followed by a friend had offered them a vape (45%) and appeal of flavours (42%). Only 6% of ever-users had tried a vape to help them stop smoking, with those living in the most deprived area being more likely to have tried a vape to stop smoking (Q1 13%) in comparison to those living in the least deprived area (Q5 3%).

Figure 40: Reasons for trying a vape % (multiple response, n=1,244)



There was variance in where young people had tried their first vape, with school being the most common (18%). Seventeen percent indicated that it had been on a night out such as when at a party, a bar or night club (Figure 41). Other common places were at a friend's house (13%) or at their own home (12%).

Figure 41: Place where first tried a vape %

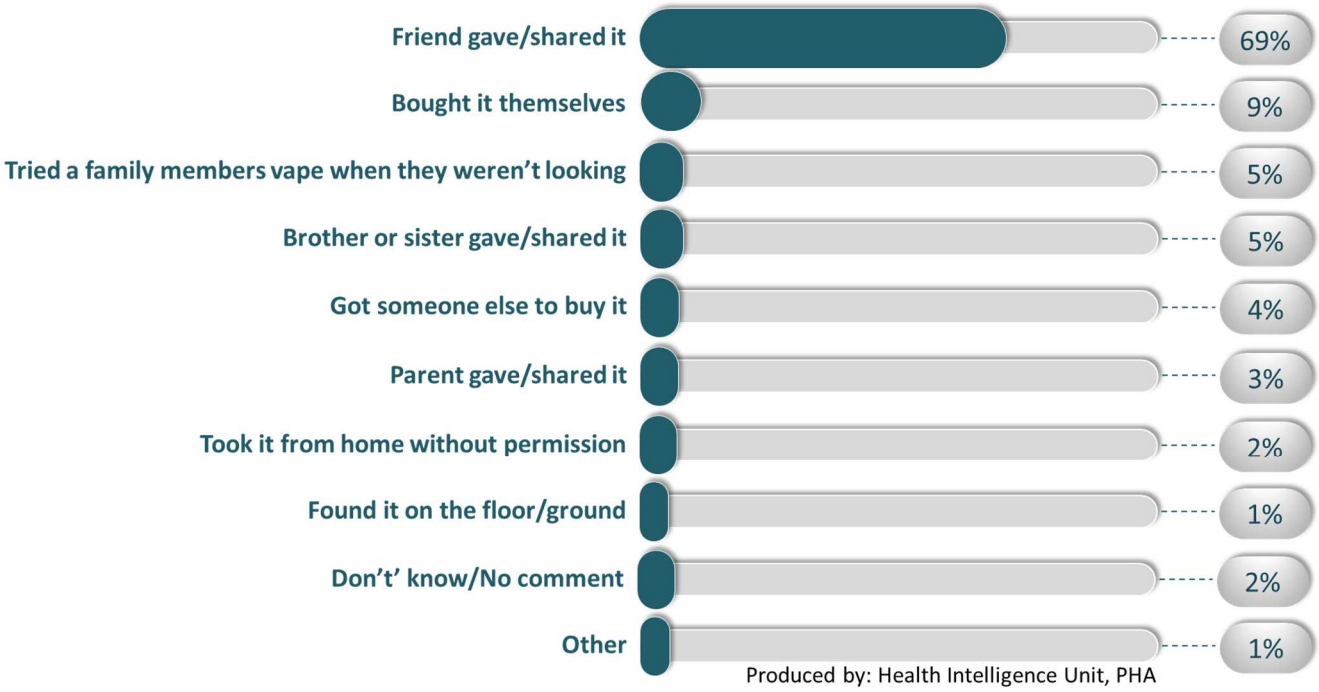


When trying a vape for the first time, the majority had got the vape from a friend (69%), this was either shared with or given to them. Nine percent had purchased the vape themselves, 8% had been given it or offered it to try by a family member (5% by siblings; 3% by parents). Although it was a small minority (1%), it is concerning that a few young people had found a vape lying on the floor or ground and decided to pick it up and give it a try (Figure 42).

On further analysis, females were more likely to have been given or offered their first vape to try from friends (73%) than males (63%), with a slightly higher proportion of males (12%) compared to females (8%) indicating that they had purchased the vape themselves. Males were also more likely to indicate that their parent/guardian had given or shared a vape with them (4% males compared to 1% females).

A higher proportion of those in the upper Year Groups indicated that friends had given or shared a vape with them (ranging from 75% to 81%) compared to those in the lower Year Groups (ranging from 49% to 62%). Those in the lower year groups were more likely to report that they had taken a few puffs of a family members vape when they were not looking in comparison to those in the upper year groups with proportions ranging from 1% among those in Year 14 to 17% among those in Year 8 with proportions reducing through the Year Groups. A much higher proportion of young people in Year 8 indicated that a parent or guardian had given or shared a vape with them (12%) compared to those in other Year Groups (2% to 3%).

Figure 42: Where they got their first vape from % (multiple response)

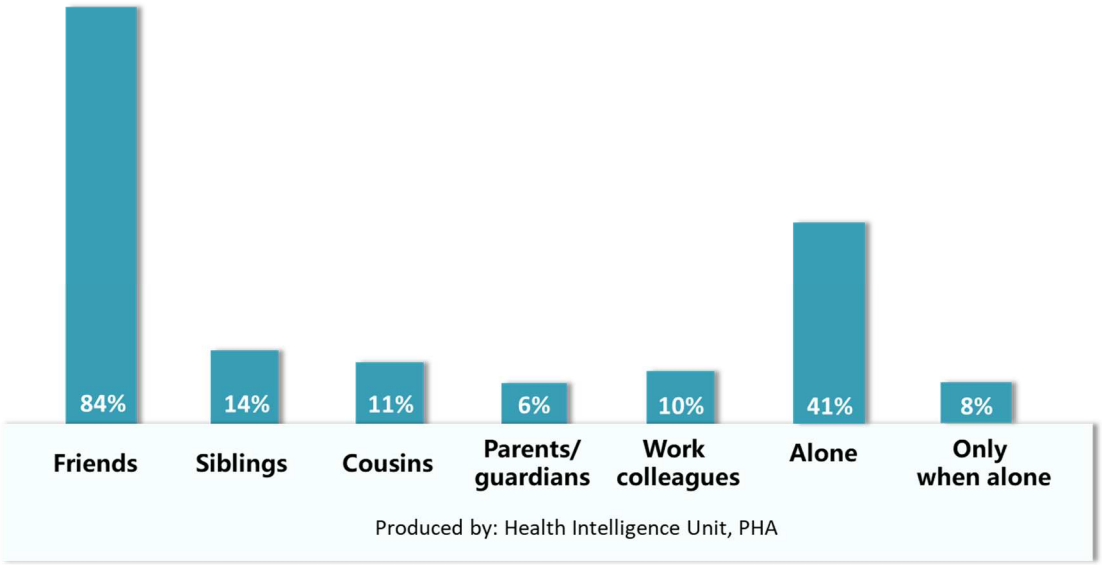


Of those who had either bought the vape themselves or got someone to buy it for them, just over half had bought it from a vape shop (51%), with 41% having bought it from a supermarket or local shop such as a vivo, spar, or discount store. Thirteen percent had bought it from a friend and 10% had purchased vapes through a website. Six percent had purchased their vapes through social media, with Snapchat being the most common followed by Instagram.

Vaping behaviour

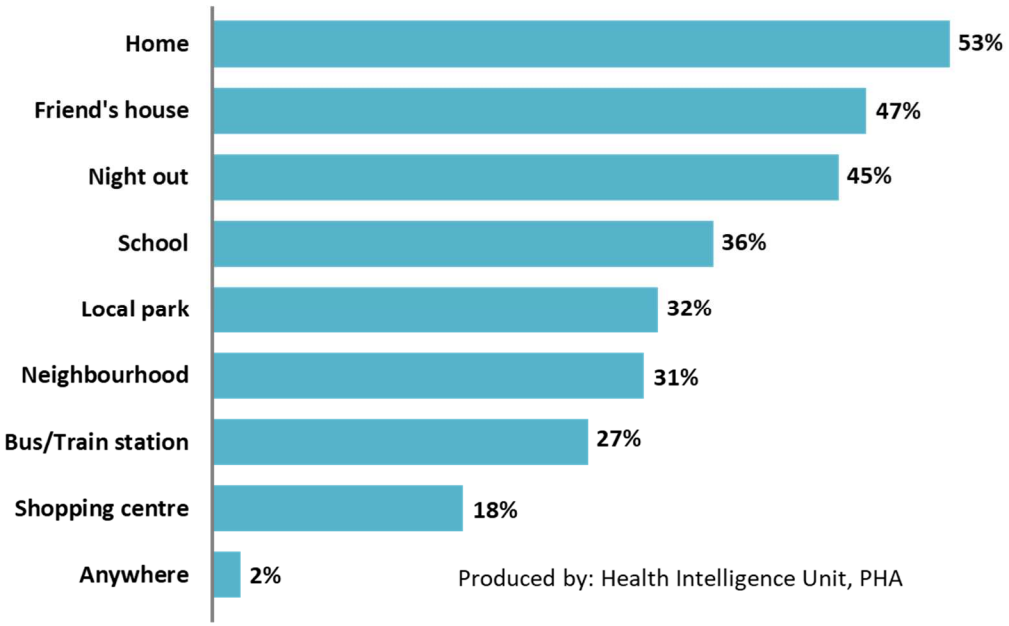
Vaping would primarily be a social activity among young people, with the vast majority reporting that they would normally vape in the company of other vapers (92%). Most would be accompanied by friends when vaping (84%); 14% reported vaping in the company of siblings (Figure 43). Young people were least likely to vape along with their parents or guardians (6%). Thirty-two percent indicated that they vaped along with others and also when alone, with 8% indicating that they only vaped when alone.

Figure 43: If normally vape along with others % (multiple response)



As highlighted in Figure 44, the most common places were young people usually vape are at home (53%); at a friend's house (47%) on a night out (45%); and when at school (36%). Among those who vape at home, the most common location would be in their bedroom (90%), with 40% indicating that they vape anywhere within the home, the garden was also a popular location (26%). When at parties was the most common (99%) among those who indicated they usually vape on a night out. Of those who usually vaped at school, vaping in the toilets was most common (96%), followed by in the changing rooms (44%).

Figure 44: Most common places to vape % (multiple response)

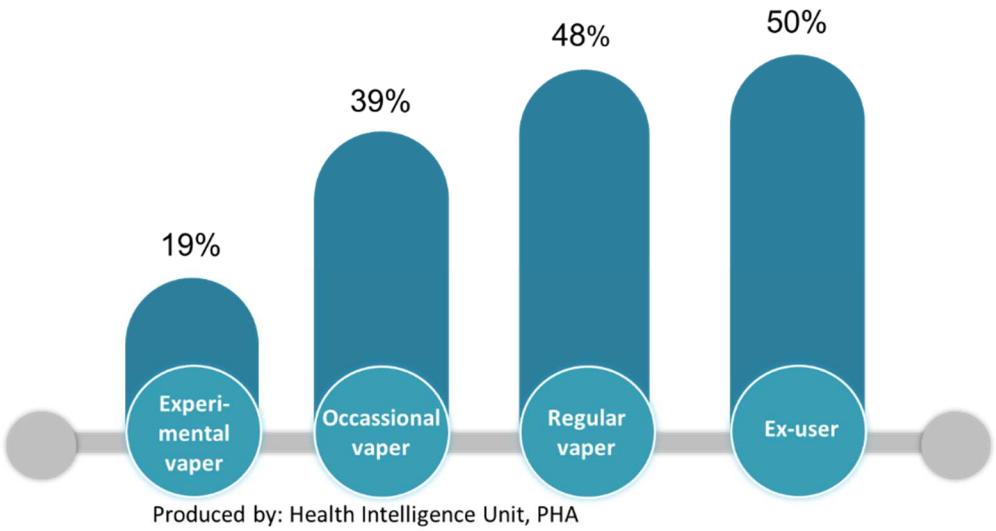


Sharing of vapes was very common among young people, with almost three in four ever-vapers indicating that they have shared their vape with someone else (72%).

Side effects from using vapes

Among those young people who had ever-used vapes, approximately 2 in 5 reported that they had experienced side effects from using vapes (39%). As demonstrated in Figure 45, those who use or had used vapes regularly were more likely to have experienced side effects in comparison to occasional or experimental users.

Figure 45: Proportion who experienced side effects from using vapes %



As illustrated in Figure 46, feeling lightheaded or dizzy, having headaches, getting a nicotine rush and being breathless were the most common side effects young people had experienced as a result of vaping.

Less common side effects included bad skin, sore stomach, diarrhoea, cravings and decrease in appetite. Some young people reported that they had experienced mood swings, feelings of low mood and having a lack of concentration as a result of vaping.

It is important to note that some young people experienced a combination of side effects.

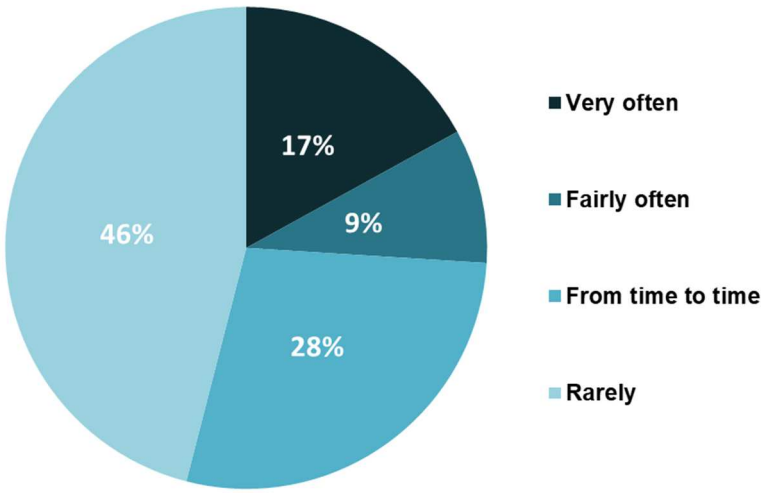
Figure 46: Common side effects experienced from using vapes

A small propotion of ever-vapers reported that they had to get out of class or go home from school as they had felt ill from vaping (7%), with 18% reporting that they had a friend who had to leave class or school because they were ill from vaping. One in four reported that they had got out of class because they had the urge to vape (25%), with 48% reporting that their friend/s had done so.

If used vapes to take recreational drugs

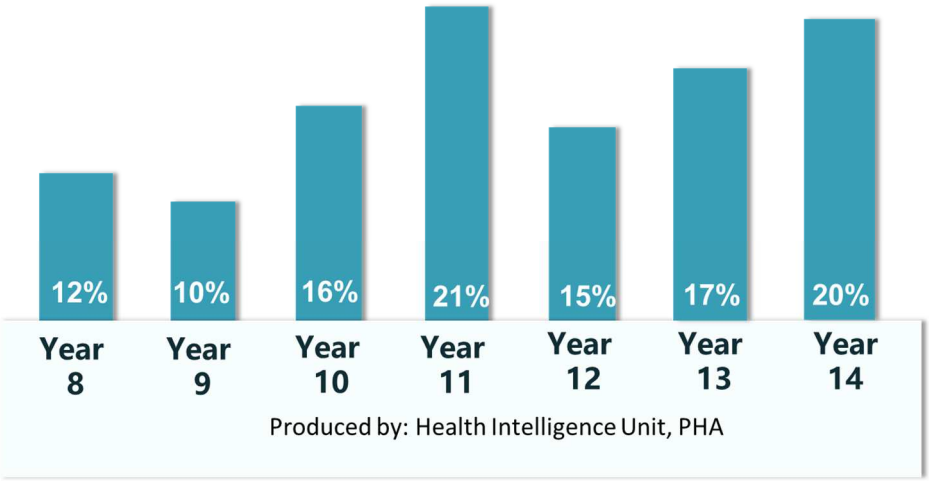
Among those young people who had ever-used a vape, 17% indicated that they had used vapes to take recreational drugs (equating to 4% of total sample). Among current vapers 21% have used vapes to take recreational drugs, of these 17% reported frequency of use as being very often, with under half (46%) indicating that they rarely use vapes for this purpose (Figure 47).

Figure 47: Frequency of taking recreational drugs in vapes among current vapers % (n=236)



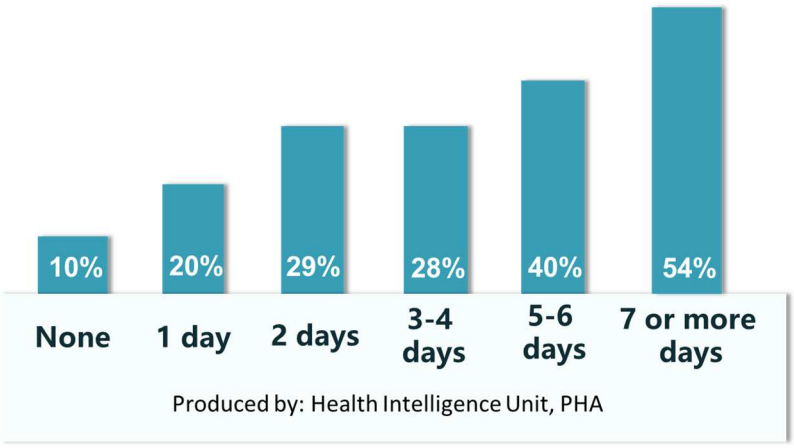
Males are more likely to have taken recreational drugs in vapes (22%) in comparison to females (13%). Proportions varied by year group (Figure 48), with those in the lower year groups being less likely to have used vapes to take recreational drugs compared to those in the upper year groups, with proportions ranging from 10% in Year 9 to 21% in Year 11.

Figure 48: Proportion of ever-vapers taking recreational drugs in vapes by Year Group % (n=1,473)



Young people who had cut or skipped class were considerably more likely to have used vapes to take recreational drugs (Figure 49). Those who had cut/skipped class on 7 or more days within the last 30 days being five times more likely to have taken recreational drugs in a vape (54%) compared to those who had never cut/skipped class (10%).

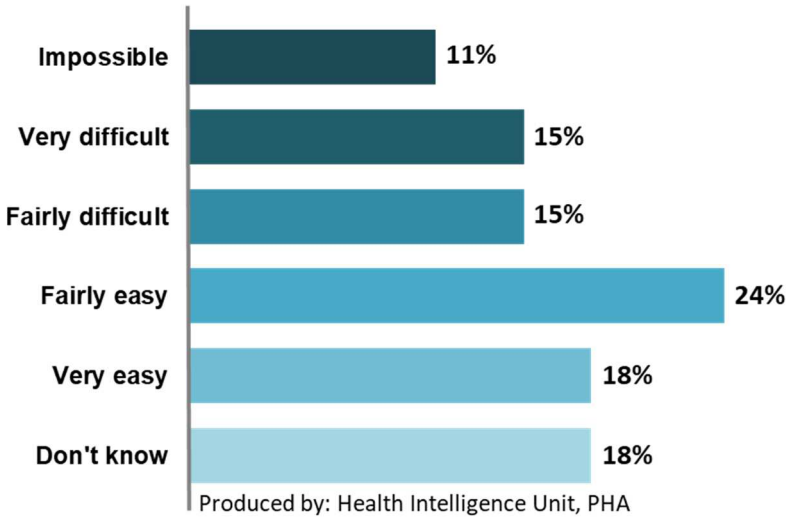
Figure 49: Proportion of ever-vapers taking recreational drugs in vapes by number of days a pupil had skipped class (during the last 30 days) % (n=1,487)



Accessing vapes

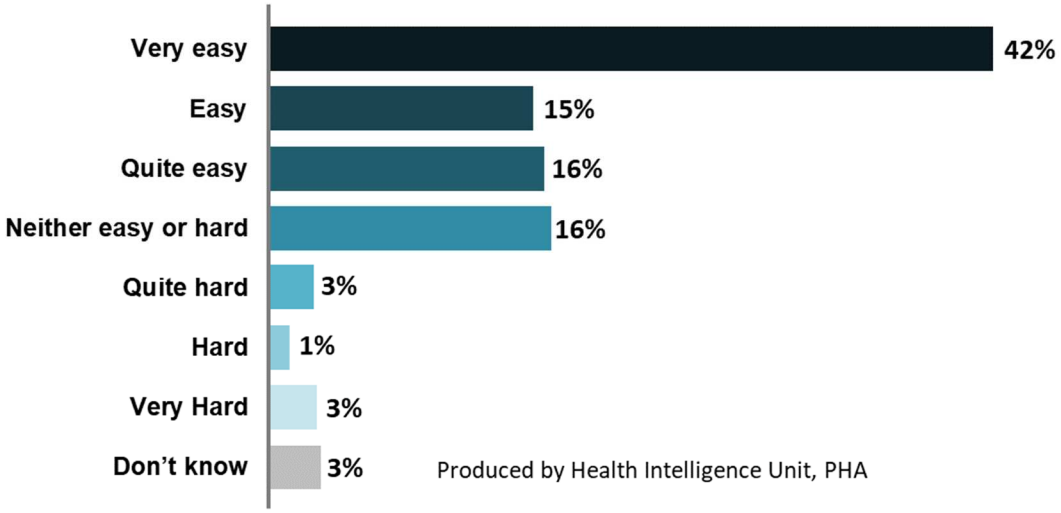
When asked how difficult they thought it would be to get vapes if they wanted to, 2 in 5 never vapers thought it would be difficult to access vapes, with almost 1 in 5 being unsure (Figure 50).

Figure 50: Ease of accessing vapes if wanted to – never vapers % (n=6,091)



In general, young people (current and past regular users) found it easy (74%) to access vapes (Figure 51).

Figure 51: Ease of accessing vapes – Current and past regular users % (n=1,244)



Although a small proportion stated that they found it hard to access vapes (6%), those in the lower year groups found it more difficult in comparison to those in the upper year groups, with proportions ranging from 2% among those in Year 14 to 14% among those in Year 9.

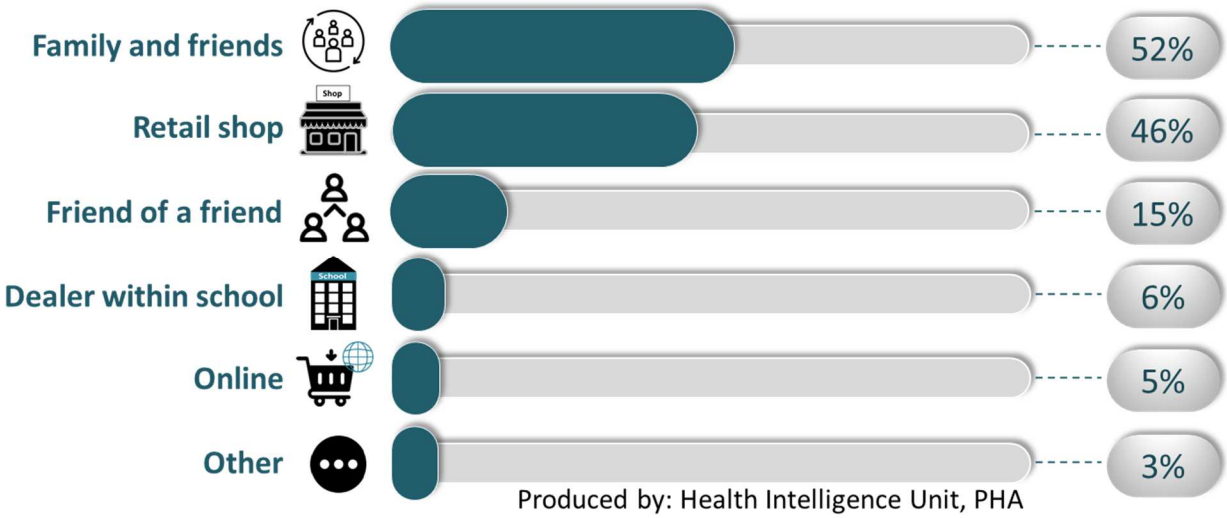
Young people could easily access vapes from many sources (Figure 52), and when asked where they would normally get their vapes from, family and friends were the most common sources (52%). Of those who stated family and friends (n=645), the vast majority normally get/got their vapes from friends (84%), followed by siblings (12%), with 11% stating parents/guardians.

Purchasing vapes direct from local retail shops was also very common (46%). When purchasing from local shops young people tend to buy from vape shops (69%). Fifty-two percent bought vapes from a supermarket or convenience store, with 8% buying from a discount store, and 2% bought from a pharmacy. Purchasing vapes online was less common among young people with 5% having purchased vapes direct from a website or a social media site such as TikTok.

Fifteen percent normally got/bought their vapes from someone their friends knew, such as a friend of a friend, or a friend's family member. A few young people purchased vapes from a dealer within their school (6%). Other, less common sources included from car boot sales or markets (2%), and through a social media deal meet-up (2%).

It is important to note that young people access their vapes from a combination of sources.

Figure 52: Where mainly access vapes % (multiple response)

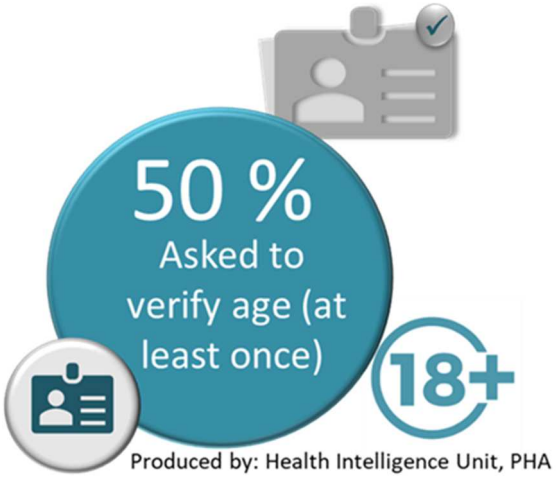


Those in the lower school year groups were more likely to get their vapes from family and friends compared to those in the upper year groups (46% among Year 8 pupils compared to 30% among those in Year 14).

Purchasing vapes from local shops/supermarkets was more common among young people in the upper year groups, with over half of those in Year 14 (58%) purchasing vapes from shops compared to 10% of those in Year 9.

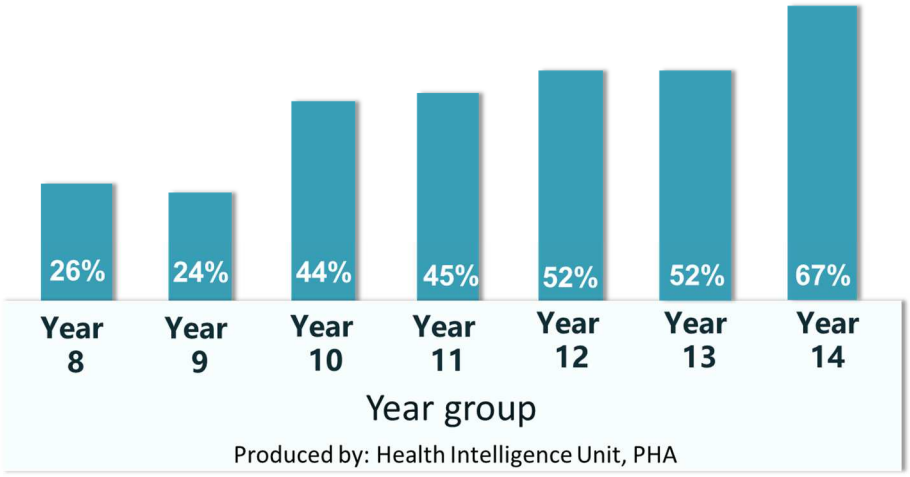
Verification of age

Although the minimum age of sale for electronic cigarettes is 18, half of young people who usually purchased vapes or e-liquids from local shops, car boot sales, markets or on-line reported that they had been asked, at least once, to show ID when purchasing from local retailers or to verify their age when making on-line purchases.



Of interest and as highlighted in Figure 53, young people in the upper Year Groups were most likely to be asked to show ID and to verify their age compared to those in the lower Year Groups.

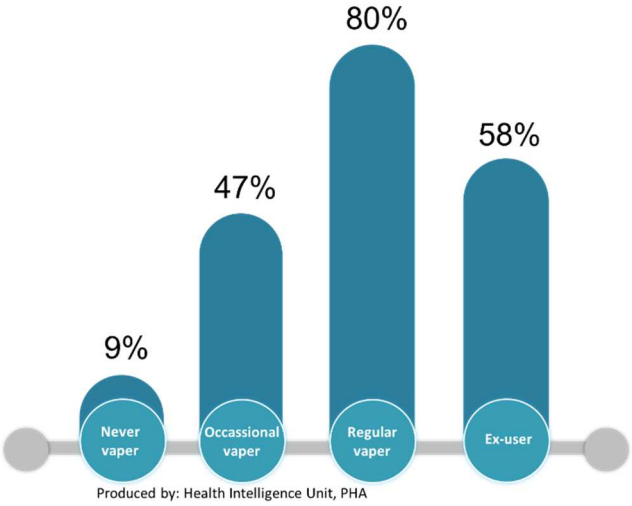
Figure 53: Proportion asked to show ID or verify age when purchasing vapes by Year Group % (n=593)



Purchasing for others

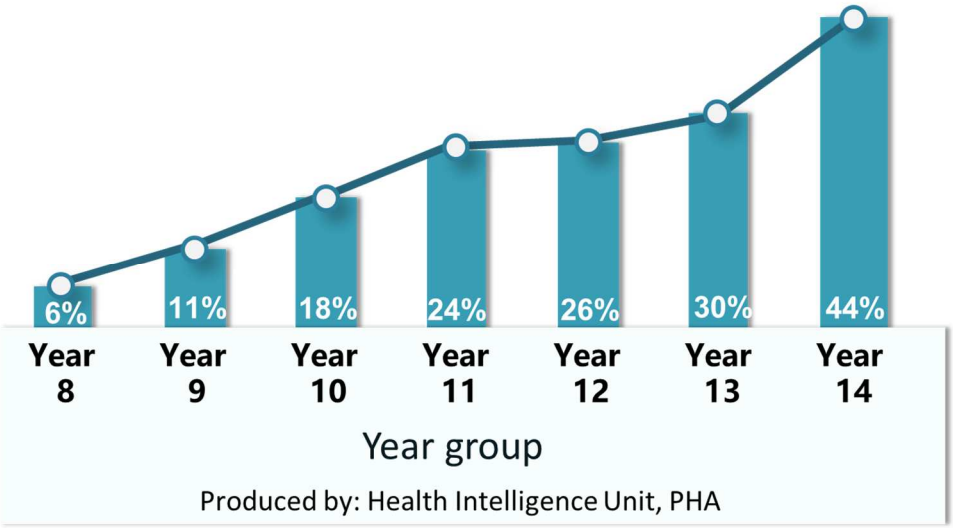
Around 1 in 5 young people reported that they had ever been asked, at least once, to purchase a vaping product on behalf of someone else (18%). Those who had never vaped were least likely to have been asked to make a purchase on behalf of someone else (9%). Whereas, just over half of ever-vapers reported having been asked (55%). On further analysis by vaping status regular vapers were most likely to be approached, with 4 in 5 regular vapers reporting having been asked (80%) in comparison to 47% of occasional vapers (Figure 54).

Figure 54: Proportion asked to purchase vaping products for someone else % (n=7,581)



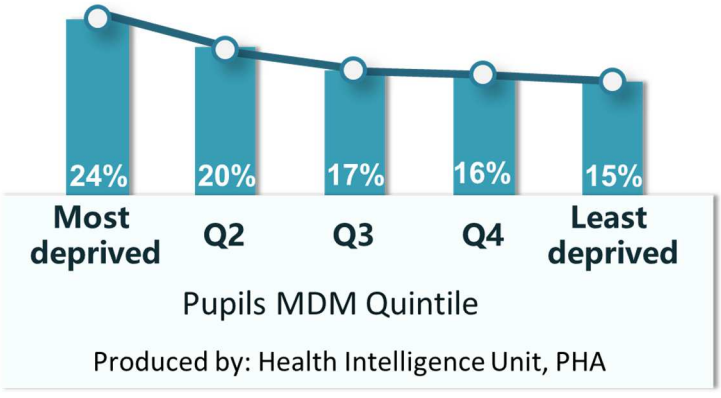
Those in the upper Year Groups were considerably more likely to have been asked to make a purchase on behalf of someone else compared to those in the lower Year Groups, with proportions increasing through the Year Groups ranging from 6% of Year 8's to 44% of those in Year 14 (Figure 55).

Figure 55: Proportion asked to purchase vaping products for someone else by Year Group %



As highlighted in Figure 56, young people living in the most deprived areas were more likely to indicate having been asked to purchase vaping products on behalf of someone else, with proportions decreasing through the quintiles, ranging from 15% to 24%.

Figure 56: Proportion asked to purchase vaping products for someone else by MDM SOA Quintile %



A small proportion of young people reported having ever purchased a vaping product for someone else (7%). Those who ever-vaped were more likely to make a purchase for someone else (34%) compared to those who had never vaped (1%). Among those who indicated having been asked to purchase vaping products on behalf of someone else, almost 2 in 5 indicated that they had made a purchase (38%).

Device type and flavours

Type of device

Single-use disposables were the most commonly used vaping device among young people (77%), followed by refillable vape tanks (8%). Three percent used refillable vapes pen, 2% used refillable vape pods, and 2% used rebuildable/mechanical mods. Only 1% used squonk mods. Two percent were not aware of the type of devices they used as they shared other people's or they did not know enough about the various types available.

77% use disposable vapes

On further analysis by key demographics, a higher proportion of females used single-use disposables (84%) compared to males (68%). Males were more likely to use refillable vape tanks (12%) than females (5%).

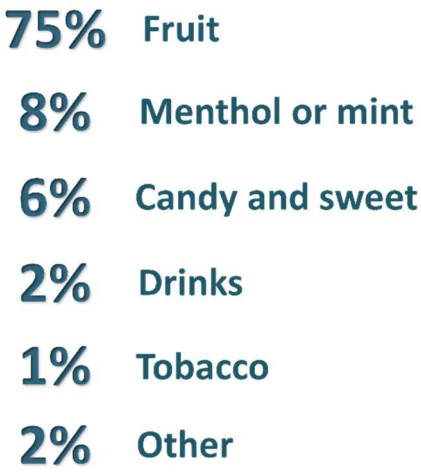
A higher proportion of young people in Year 8 used refillable vape pens (9%) compared to other Year Groups (ranging from 1% to 4%). Young people in the upper Year Groups were more likely to use refillable vape tanks compared to those in the lower Year Groups, with proportions increasing through Year Groups, ranging from 1% among Year 8 pupils to 12% among Year 13 and Year 14 pupils.

A higher proportion of young people who had skipped or 'cut class' on 3 or more days during the last 30 days used refillable vape tanks (13%) compared to young people who had not skipped class (6%).

Flavours

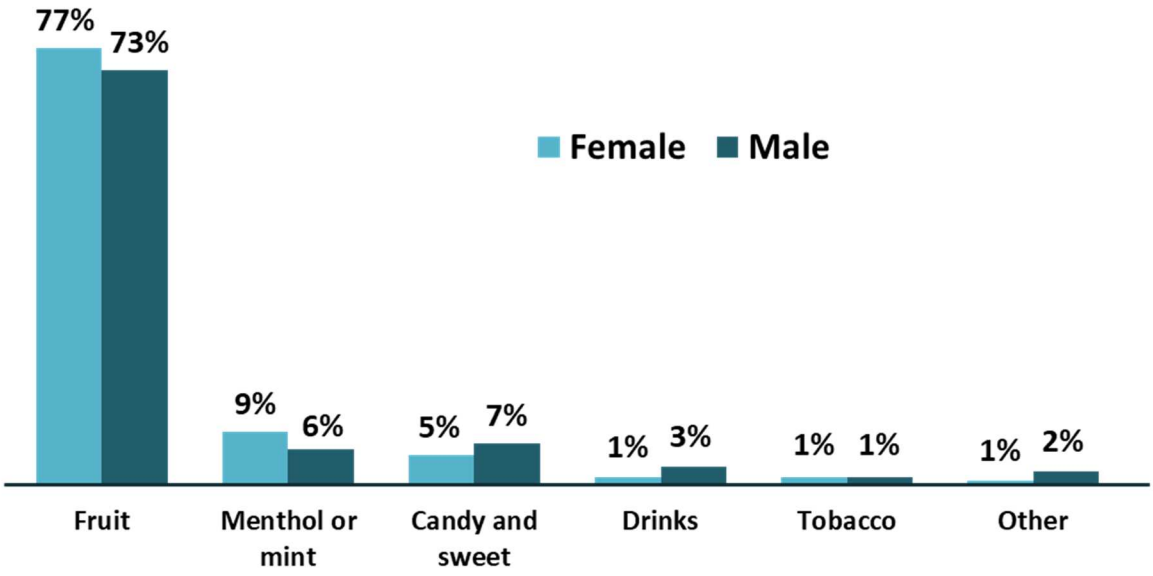
Fruit flavours are the most popular among young people with 3 in 4 indicating that they would normally use fruity flavours (Figure 57). A small minority indicated that they would use a variety of flavours depending on what was on offer at the time.

Figure 57: Flavours used most frequently %



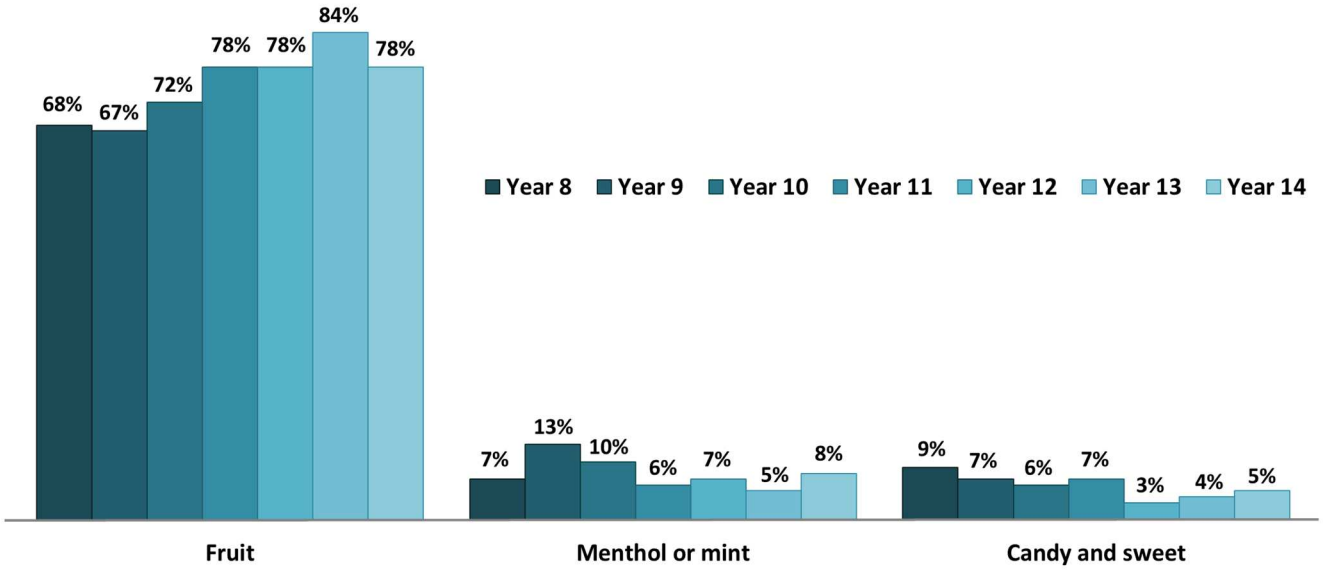
Females were more likely to use menthol or mint flavoured vapes compared to males, with males more likely to use drinks flavours and, candy and sweet flavours than females as illustrated in Figure 58.

Figure 58: Flavours used most frequently by Sex %



As highlighted in Figure 59, there was variance in popularity of flavours across Year Groups. Fruit flavours were more popular among those in the upper Year Groups, whereas, menthol/mint flavours and candy flavours were more popular among those in the lower Year Groups.

Figure 59: Flavours used most frequently by Year Group %



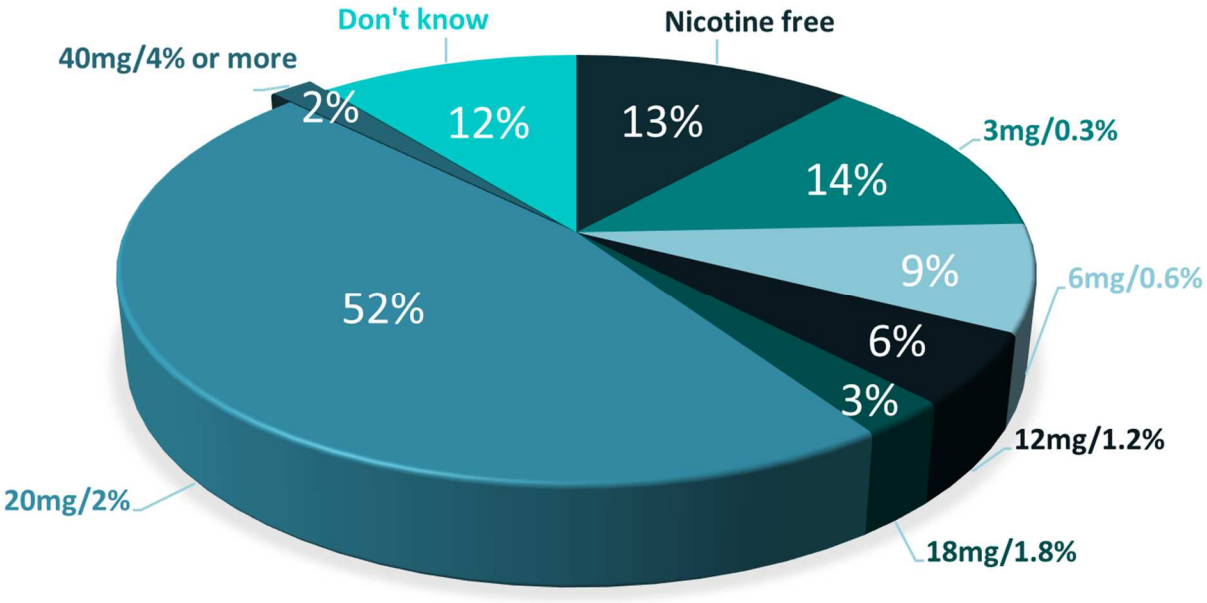
Nicotine strength

The maximum nicotine concentration permitted to be sold into the UK market is 20mg. This regulation was implemented to ensure that e-cigarettes and related products are used responsibly therefore protecting consumers from excessive nicotine intake. A 2% vape or 20mg/2% of nicotine in an e-liquid is considered high strength and in general this high concentration of nicotine is recommended for heavy smokers (who may smoke a pack of 20 cigarettes or more a day) using e-cigarettes as a means to quit smoking.

Although the majority of ever-vapers (76%) within this study had never smoked cigarettes prior to starting vaping, just over half (52%) have used this high concentration of nicotine (20mg/2%), with a further 3% having used 18mg/1.8%). Fourteen percent used a low concentration of 3mg. Just over one in ten (13%) indicated that they used nicotine free (Figure 60). A small proportion used a variety of strengths depending on what was on offer at the time.

Of concern, is that a small proportion of young people had access to vapes or e-liquids that were above 20mg/2%, with 2% indicating having used a nicotine concentration of 40mg or more.

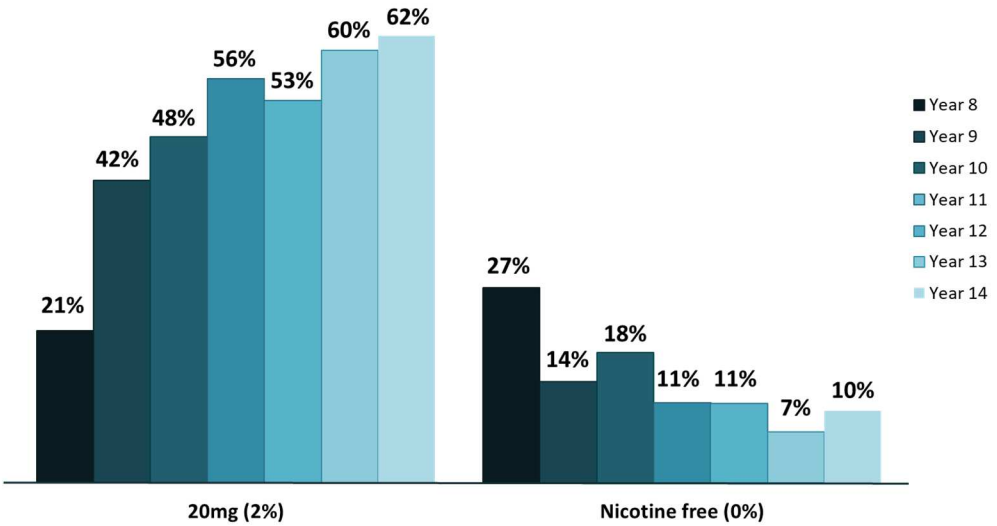
Figure 60: Strength of nicotine used most frequently %



A greater proportion of males used a high strength of nicotine than females, with 56% of males having used 20mg/2% in comparison to 49% of females and; 4% of males having used a concentration of 40mg/4% or more compared to 1% of females.

As highlighted in Figure 61 below, those in the upper Year Groups were more likely to use a high concentration of nicotine (20mg/2%) compared to those in the lower Year Groups, with proportions increasing through the Year Groups. Young people in their first year of post-primary were most likely to use nicotine free, with just over 1 in 4 frequently using 0mg (27%) compared to 1 in 10 of those in Year 14.

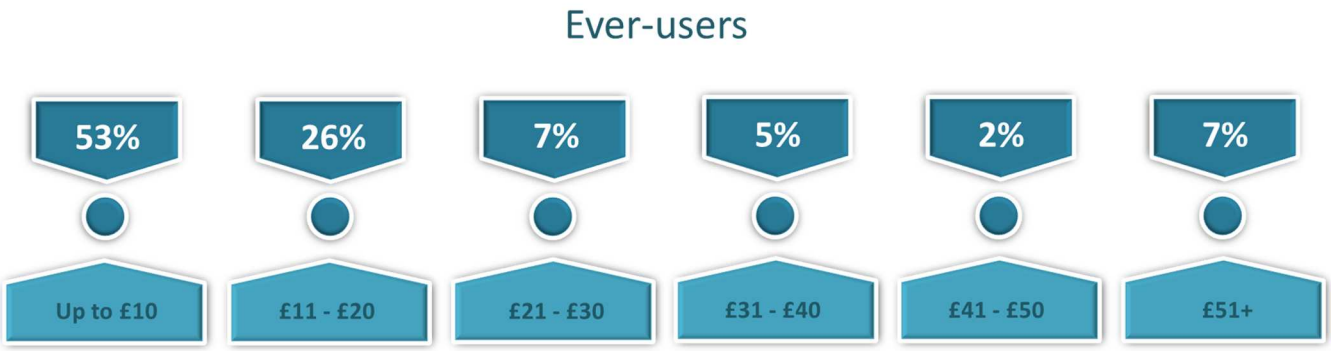
Figure 61: Proportion using 20mg or 0mg nicotine concentration by Year Group %



Weekly spend

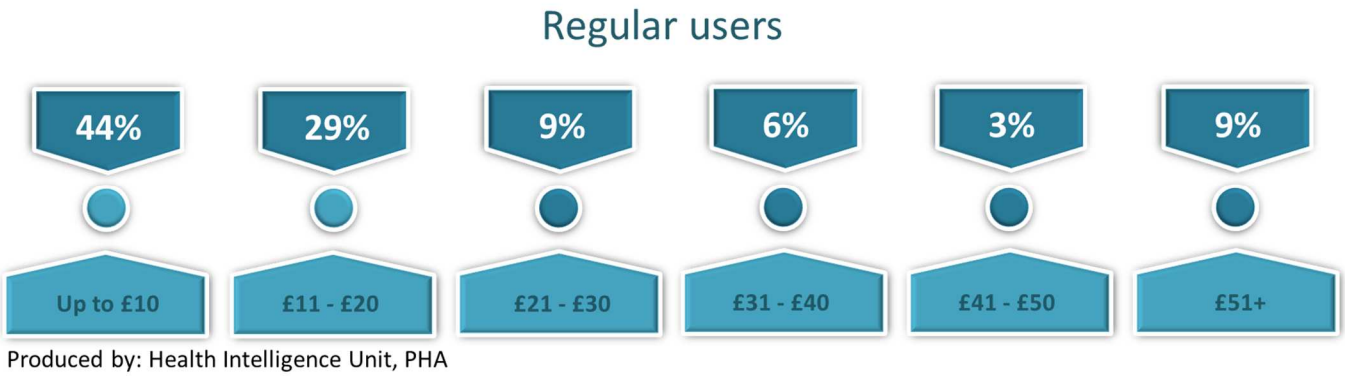
Of those ever-vapers who had purchased vapes and/or e-liquids, just over half spend/have spent up to £10 a week on vaping products, with 14% spending £31 or more (Figure 62). Among current users, those who are regular users would spend more per week than those who are experimental or occasional vapers, with 1 in 4 regular users spending over £20 a week compared to 3% of experimental users and 4% of occasional users.

Figure 62: Weekly spend on vaping products among ever-users %



Of those who regularly vape, more than half spend over £10 a week (56%). Approximately 1 in 5 spend over £30 a week on vaping products, with 9% spending over £50 (Figure 63).

Figure 63: Weekly spend on vaping products among regular users %



On further analysis of regular users by key demographics, males would be most likely to spend more on vaping products than females, with 21% of males reporting that they spend over £30 a week compared to 16% of females. Males were twice as likely to spend over £50 a week than females (13% and 7% respectively).

There was variance in spend per week among regular users across Year Groups, with proportions of those who spend up to £10 a week ranging from 35% of those in Year 10 to 57% among Year 14's. There was a noticeable difference in the proportion of those who

spend over £50 a week on vaping products. Proportions ranged from 1% among Year 13's to 14% of those in Year 8.

There was a notable difference in weekly spend across areas of deprivation with those living in the most deprived area (Q1) spending much more on vaping products than those living in other areas, with just over 1 in 4 (28%) spending over £30 a week on products in comparison to those living in other quintiles (ranging from 14% to 16% across Q2 to Q5).

Young people who had skipped or 'cut class' on 7 or more days during the last month were considerably more likely to spend over £30 a week on vaping products compared to those who had never skipped class or those who had skipped class on 1-6 days (44% vs 8%-12% respectively).

Importance of vaping devices

Those who were regular vapers were asked to rate the relative importance (to them) of factors associated with vaping. When it came to vaping, 'flavouring and taste' (59%) and 'relaxation and stress relief' were considered very important (51%). Of least importance was the design of the vape (e.g. colour, shape or brand) and 'being able to make big vapour clouds, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Relative importance of factors % (n=594)

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
Flavouring and taste	59%	24%	11%	5%	2%
Relaxation and stress relief	51%	21%	14%	8%	6%
Quality of device	42%	32%	15%	6%	6%
The effect of nicotine	42%	23%	19%	10%	6%
The price	39%	24%	22%	8%	7%
Suppression of appetite	30%	14%	19%	15%	22%
Discreet to use	24%	17%	24%	19%	16%
Making big vapour clouds	21%	11%	18%	26%	24%
Vape designs	16%	12%	19%	25%	28%

Produced by: Health Intelligence, PHA

On further analysis by key demographics, males were more likely to consider the quality of the device as being very important compared to females (45% and 39% respectively). Males (47%) were also more likely to consider the nicotine 'hit' as being very important than females (37%). Males and those in the lower year groups were more likely to consider 'vapes being discreet to use' and 'being able to make big vapour clouds' as very important

compared to females and those in other year groups. Females were more likely to consider 'suppression of appetite and food cravings' as being very important in comparison to males (34% and 25% respectively). A higher proportion of those in Year 8 and 9 thought that price was not very or at all important (35% and 29%) compared to those in other year groups (ranging from 5% to 22%).

Quitting

Around two thirds of current vapers (64%) had tried to quit vaping, with 55% indicating that they had been successful and had remained quit for a period of time. Those in the upper year groups were less likely to have tried to quit vaping than those in the lower year groups with proportions ranging from 58% in Year 14 to 79% in Year 8.

When asked about their willingness to stop vaping, one third of current vapers (35%) indicated 'yes' they would like to stop, with 34% indicating 'maybe'. Those in Year 8 were most likely to indicate 'yes' they would like to stop vaping compared to those in other Year Groups, with proportions ranging from 29% in Year 12 to 48% in Year 8. There was variance in proportions indicating 'yes' across MDM quintiles, ranging from 28% in Q3 to 43% in Q2.

A small proportion of current vapers indicated that they would like help/support to quit vaping, with 14% stating 'yes' and 10% stating 'maybe'. Those in the lowest Year Group (Year 8, 34%) were more likely to indicate that they would like help/support (yes or maybe) in comparison to those in the upper Year Groups (Year 13, 20% and Year 14, 18%).

Produced by: Health Intelligence Unit, PHA

Motivation to quit vaping

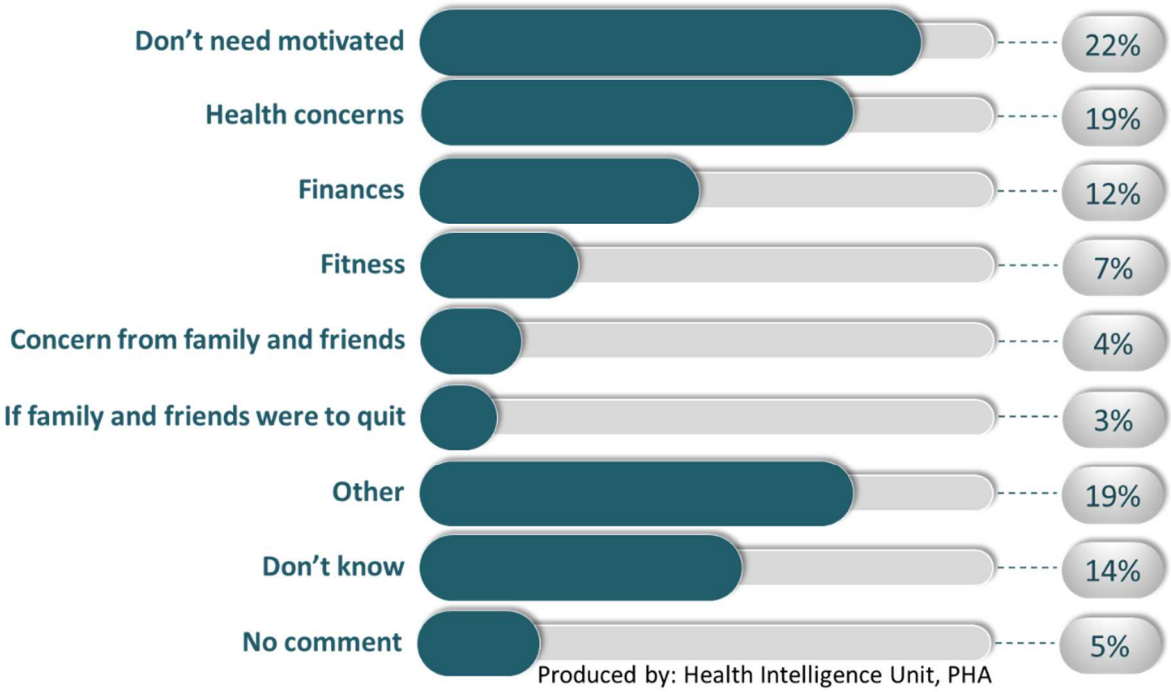
Current vapers were asked about what would motivate them to stop vaping (Figure 64). Health concerns (19%) was the most common motivator. Awareness about the long-term health risks of vaping (13%) and; if vaping had a negative impact on their health (6%) such as being diagnosed with cancer or lung damage may encourage them to stop.

Some young people reported that they would consider quitting to save on finances (12%). This included if made aware of how much they could save, and if price of vapes increased and got too expensive. Others suggested that they would quit if given a financial incentive to do so.

Desire for better athletic performance was also mentioned as a potential motivator (7%) in order to improve stamina, lung capacity and overall fitness. Concern from family members or personal experiences with loved ones' health issues related to smoking or vaping may motivate them to quit (4%). Some may be encouraged to quit if friends or family members were to stop vaping (3%).

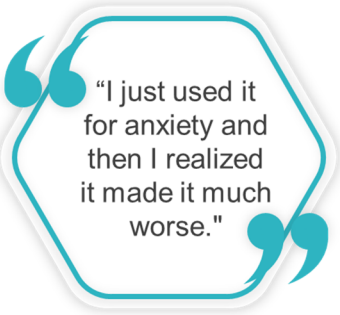
Around 1 in 5 current vapers were of the view that they did not need motivation to quit (22%) as they either had self-control, were not addicted, or did not vape that often, therefore they would be able to stop anytime they wanted to.

Figure 64: Motivating factors % (multiple responses)



Past users - Why quit vaping

Past users who had been regular users were asked why they had stopped using vapes. The most common reason why young people quit vaping was because it was unhealthy (43%), with some young people experiencing health effects such as nausea, sore chest, laboured breathing, bleeding gums and others found that it had an impact on their mental health as the following quotes suggest.



Others had decided to quit as their vaping habit had impacted on their sports performance and general fitness (12%).

The thought of being caught vaping by their parents or having been caught by parents or teachers and being disciplined was a key factor for some young people to decide to stop vaping (15%). Others stopped vaping as family members showed concern and advised about the health risks from vaping (7%).

Other reasons given included the cost/expense of vaping (8%); realised that it was stupid (5%); that it was disgusting (4%); they didn't like it (3%); it was pointless (3%); because they wanted to (3%); it was uncool (2%), there was not enough research about long-term effects (2%) and worried about developing an addiction (2%).

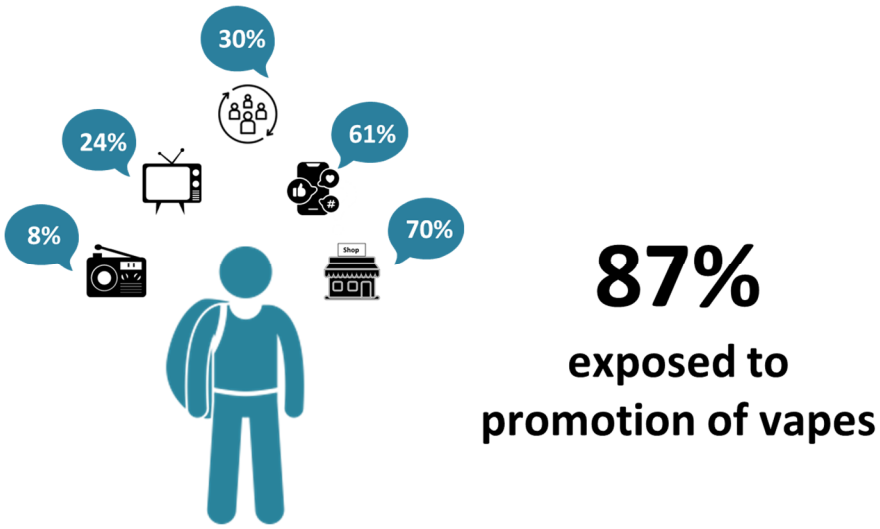
Awareness of support services

Almost one in ten young people (8%) indicated that they were aware of services that help people to quit. Of those, when asked what services they were aware of, health services were the most common response (36%), such as the NHS, doctor/GP, pharmacy, smoking cessation services, and the Public Health Agency. NRT was the second most common response (11%). Other responses included helplines (9%) such as Childline; schools (7%) for example support from nursing staff, counsellors or teachers; online services (7%) including Stop Smoking NI and Addiction NI; local charities (5%) e.g. Cancer Focus; parents (2%), counselling (2%) and rehab (2%). Some respondents gave more than one response.

Promotion of vapes

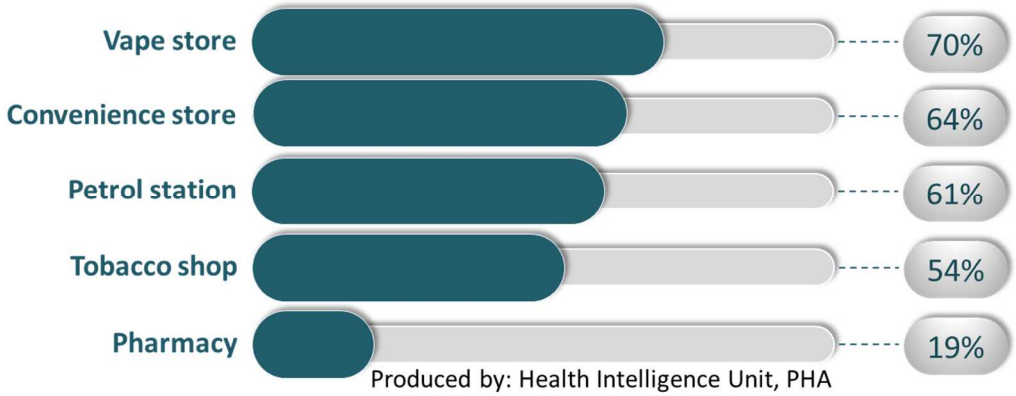
Among those young people who are aware of vapes the vast majority indicated that they had been exposed to the promotion of vapes (87%). Just over two thirds had been exposed to in-store advertising (70%), with 3 in 5 having seen the promotion of vapes on social media (61%), 30% said that their friends had promoted vapes; approximately a quarter had seen vapes promoted in movies and/or on TV (24%); 8% had heard advertising of vapes on the radio and 8% had received the promotion of vapes via email or text (Figure 65).

Figure 65: Exposure to vaping promotion % (n=7,425 multiple responses)



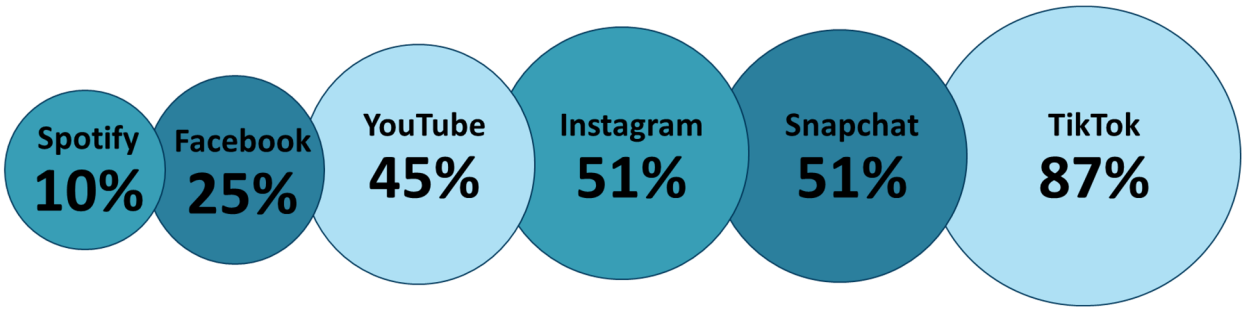
Of those who had been exposed to in-store advertising, almost two thirds had saw advertising in convenience stores (64%), with 61% having seen advertising in a petrol station (Figure 66). Around 1 in 5 had saw vapes advertised in their local pharmacy (19%).

Figure 66: In-store vaping promotion % (n=5,265 multiple responses)



Influencers and celebrities showcasing vaping on social media platforms are the main channel through which young people are exposed to the promotion of vapes on-line (89%) compared to direct brand advertisements (58%). TikTok was the most common platform (87%) on which young people saw vapes being promoted (Figure 67) compared to other social media platforms such as Instagram (51%) and Snapchat (51%).

Figure 67: Exposure to on-line promotion % (n=4,478 multiple responses)

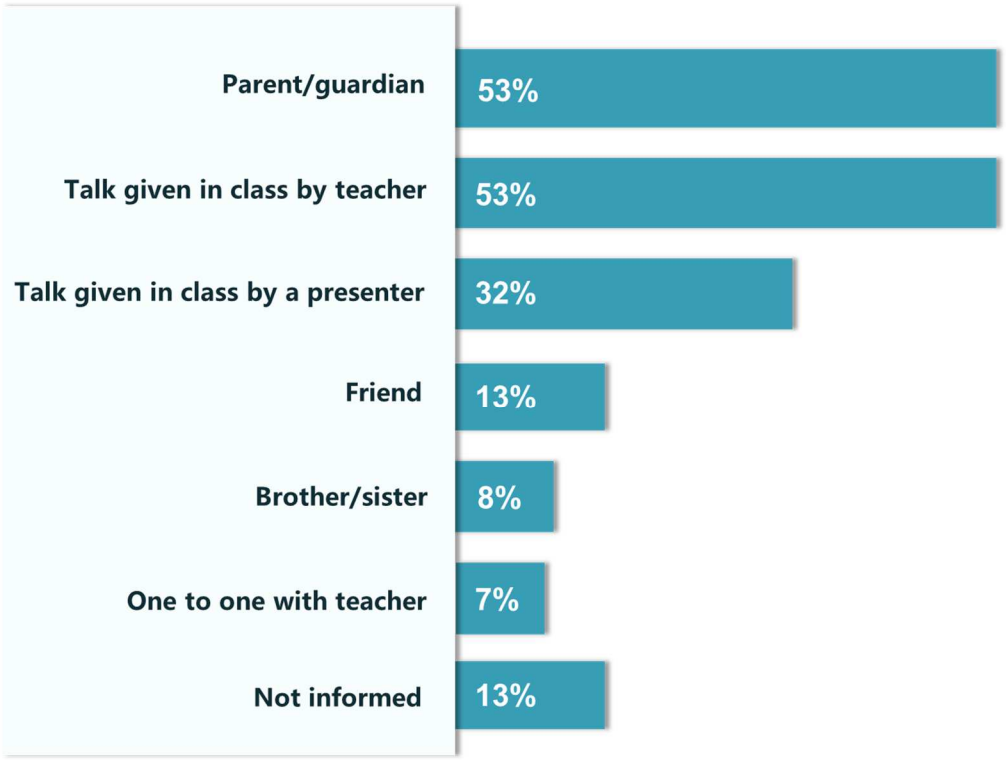


When asked how often they would see advertisements or the promotion of vapes when on-line (this includes when browsing the internet, on social media, accessing online games, or using mobile phone apps) almost half indicated that it would be rarely (48%), around 1 in 5 reported that they had never came across adverts or promotion online. One quarter reported that it would be sometimes (26%), 4% most of the time and 3% reported all the time.

Education on health risks associated with vape and cigarette use

The vast majority of young people (87%) had been informed about the risks of vaping through various channels. Teachers and parents/guardians were the most common source through which young people were educated about vaping as illustrated in Figure 68.

Figure 68: How young people had been informed about the health risks of vaping % (multiple responses)



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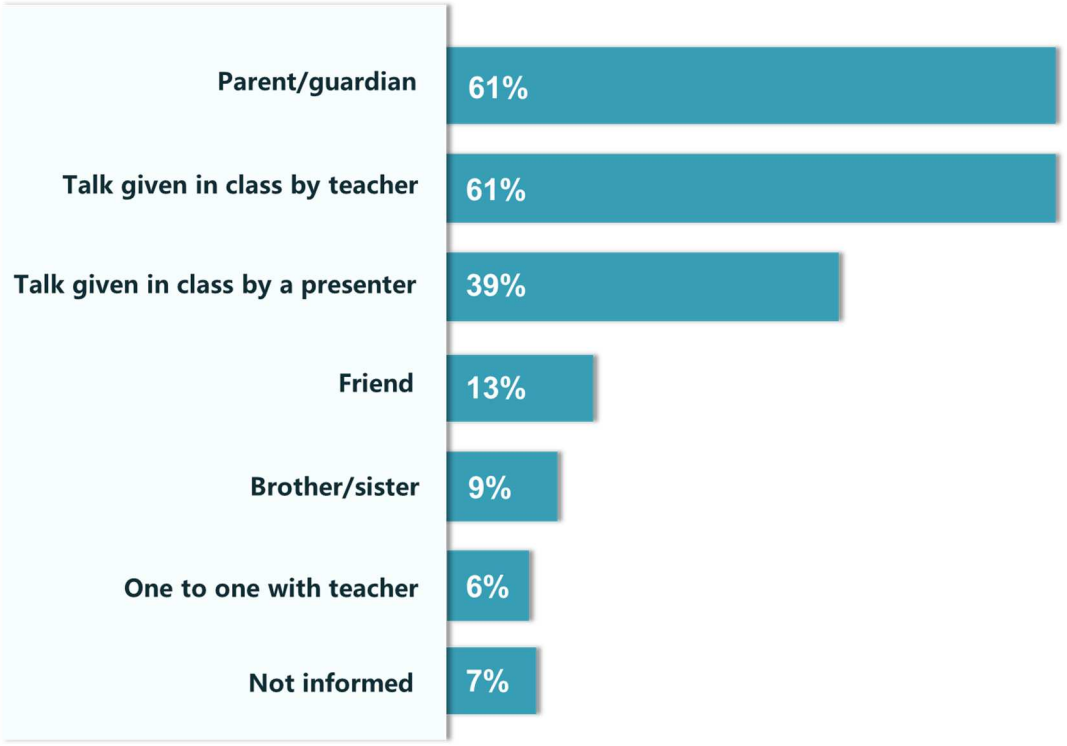
A slightly higher proportion of young people (93%) had been informed about the risks of smoking traditional cigarettes, with parents/guardians and teachers being the most common source (Figure 69).

Figure 69: How young people had been informed about the health risks of smoking % (multiple responses)



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Agreement with statements

All young people were asked to rate their level of agreement with a number of statements associated with vaping (Table 4). There were varying perceptions among young people with regard to the various statements. A common area of agreement (strongly agree/agree) among young people is the concern that vaping can cause damage to the lungs (91%), and that there are unknown risks associated with the long-term use of vapes (89%). Many recognised that vaping during adolescence can lead to addiction (85% strongly agree/agree). There was a lower level of agreement that vapes are 'healthier' than smoking cigarettes (39%).

Table 4: Levels of agreement with statements about vaping %

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Vapes help smokers to quit	10%	37%	25%	18%	10%
Vaping does have some side effects	50%	39%	7%	2%	2%
Vapes are healthier than smoking tobacco cigarettes	10%	29%	35%	16%	10%
The flavours and colourful packaging used for vapes make them appealing	41%	36%	11%	6%	6%
Vaping during adolescence can cause addiction	53%	32%	11%	2%	2%
Vaping can damage the lungs	63%	28%	6%	1%	2%
Vapes contain harmful chemicals	26%	66%	5%	1%	2%
There are unknown risks of long-term vaping	60%	29%	8%	1%	2%
Vape use may lead young people to smoke cigarettes	35%	39%	17%	7%	3%
Using vapes increases the likelihood of catching cold and flu viruses	20%	26%	42%	8%	4%

Produced by: Health Intelligence, PHA

Young people were also asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements about nicotine (Table 5). There was strong agreement among young people that nicotine is highly addictive (68%). A high proportion acknowledged that nicotine use can affect your concentration (80% strongly agree/agree), and that it can affect your behaviour by causing mood swings and anxiety (79%).

Table 5: Levels of agreement with statements about nicotine %

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Nicotine is harmless	5%	4%	9%	31%	51%
Nicotine is highly addictive	68%	5%	4%	1%	2%
Nicotine use can affect your ability to focus and learn	41%	39%	14%	3%	3%
Some vapes contain as much nicotine as a pack of 20 cigarettes	31%	34%	28%	5%	2%
Nicotine can cause mood swings and make you feel irritable or anxious	39%	40%	17%	3%	2%
Most vapes with labels that claim to be nicotine free contain nicotine and other chemicals	28%	36%	27%	6%	3%

Produced by: Health Intelligence, PHA

Second-hand vape exposure

Second-hand vape exposure can occur when you breathe in vapor from an e-cigarette used by someone else. This can happen in a home, car, or public place.

When asked if vapes were allowed to be used inside their home, a small proportion of young people (14%) reported that the use of vapes was allowed. Of these, 55% reported that vape use was allowed anywhere in the house, with 30% reporting that it was only allowed in certain places within the house (Figure 70).

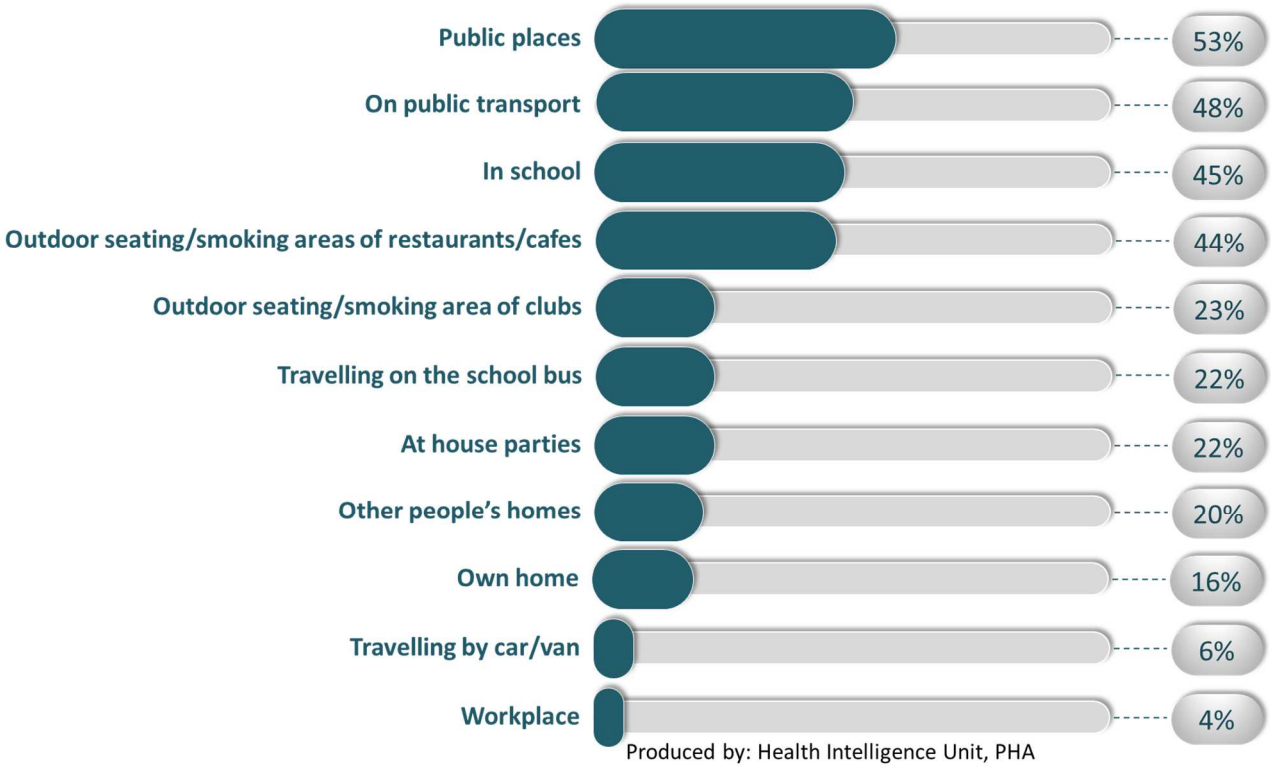
Figure 70: Vape use within the home (n=1,096)

Just over four in five young people indicated that they were regularly exposed to another person's vapour (82%). Among these young people (Figure 71), just over half reported that they were regularly exposed when in public places (53%), such as walking down the street, at sporting events, at bus stations/stops, and at concerts. Some young people had been exposed either by walking past or sitting in outdoor eating/smoking areas at restaurants/cafes (44%) or clubs (23%).

Almost half were regularly exposed in school (45%) particularly within the bathrooms, and when travelling on public transport (48%). Other common places were at house parties (22%), in other people's homes (20%) and in their own home (16%).

When asked if being regularly exposed to second-hand vapour bothered them at all, 41% indicated that yes it bothered them.

Figure 71: Places regularly exposed to vapour (n=6,189)



Knowledge of legislation

Just over two thirds of young people (68%) were aware that you have to be aged 18 and over to be able to purchase vaping products in Northern Ireland. Almost one in five said they did not know (19%). Ten percent thought it was age 16 and over, 1% thought it was age 15 and over, and 2% thought you could purchase vapes at any age. A slightly higher proportion of females were aware of age of sales (70%) compared to males (65%). Those in the upper year groups were more aware of the legal age of sales compared to those in the lower year groups, with proportions ranging from 60% in Year 8 to 86% in Year 14. Young people who use or used vapes on a regular basis were likely to be aware that you have to be aged 18 and over (79%) in comparison to those who had never vaped (66%).

The majority of young people were aware that it is illegal to sell vape products to anyone under 18 years of age (88%) or to buy/supply vape products for anyone under the age of 18 (88%).

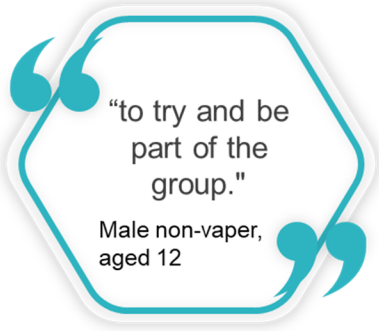
When asked if their school had a vaping policy, 74% of young people indicated that their school had a policy in place, 20% did not know if their school had a policy, and 6% indicated that their school did not have a policy in place.

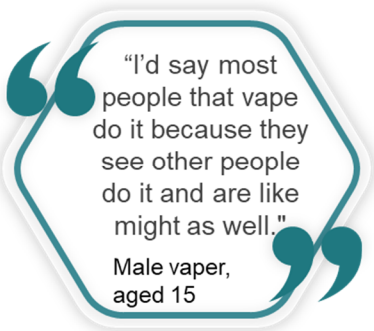

Key findings
from Focus
Groups with
Young People

General thoughts on vaping

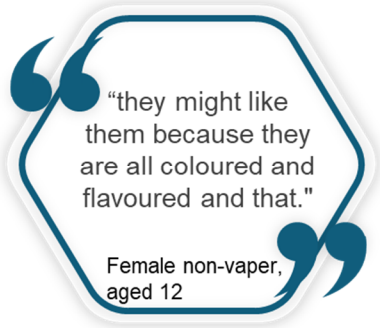
Why young people choose to vape

Young people had mixed views on why people their age choose to vape. Social influence was one key factor mentioned, as some believed young people started vaping due to social trend, peer pressure or the desire to fit in with friends.

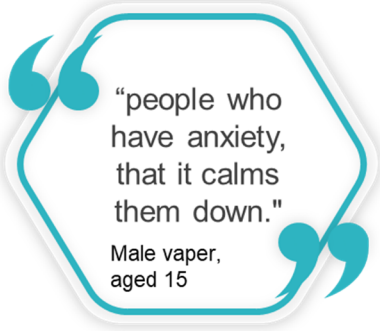




The wide range of flavours and branding of vapes was thought to be appealing to young people therefore enticing them to vape.



Some were of the view that some young people turn to vaping as a means of coping with stress, anxiety, or depression and a mechanism to deal with other issues they may face.



Those who had never vaped were more likely to say that young people vape to make them look cool in front of their friends. Other views were to make more friends; accessibility and convenience; out of curiosity; appetite suppressant; boredom; viewed as healthier than cigarettes; and ability to do tricks e.g. vapour clouds.

Why young people choose not to vape

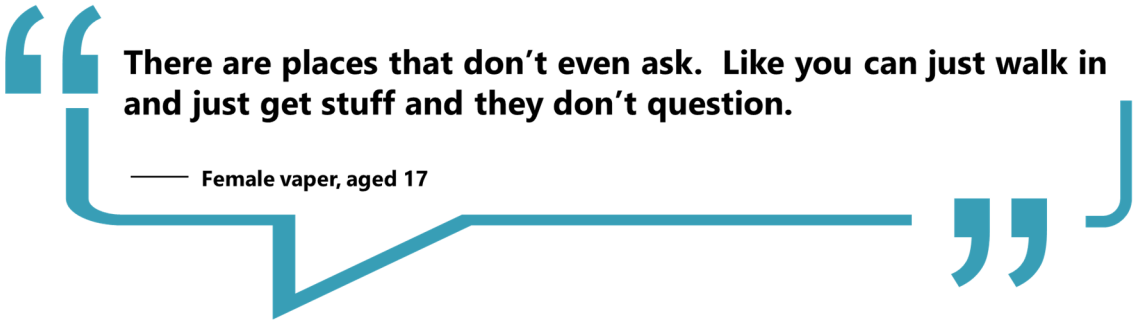
The majority were of the view that concerns about the health risks associated with vaping may discourage young people from vaping. Negative health consequences such as lung damage, cancer, gum infection and mental health were the most commonly mentioned. The lack of knowledge and research on the long-term health effects of vaping and not knowing the contents were also highlighted as factors which may discourage vaping. Some mentioned that having personal experience of family members being diagnosed with or passing away from a smoking related illness may discourage uptake of vaping.

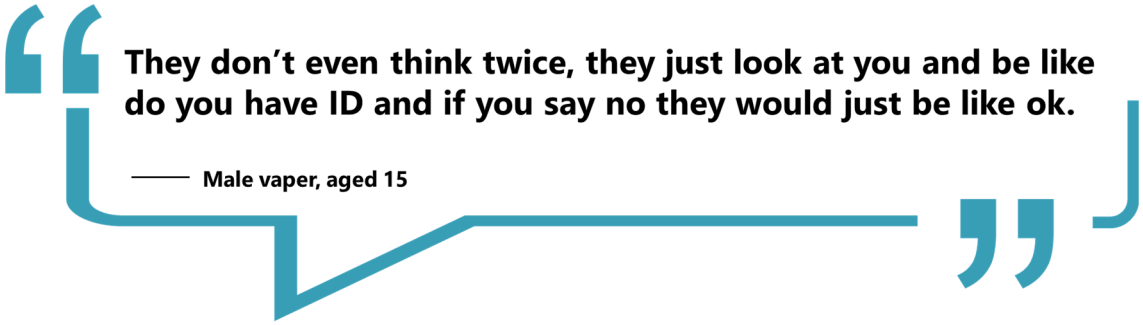
Having concerns that vaping could affect their fitness levels and sports performance, was also mentioned as being a deterrent. Other reasons stated included cost and affordability; the consequences of getting caught; afraid of becoming addicted; put off by seeing other people doing it and that it doesn't look cool; and don't like the smell.

Accessibility

When asked how easy or difficult they thought it would be for young people to get vapes, all participants agreed that it would be very easy. Although most participants were aware of the recent legislation that you need to be 18 or over to purchase vapes, young people were able to find ways around this. Participants reported that they could easily access vaping products either through older friends and siblings, buying from non-compliant retailers, buying from a dealer, or purchasing online.

Among vapers and past-vapers, the vast majority commented that they would not be asked for ID when purchasing vapes from a local retailer. Of those who were asked for ID, the general view was that if they said they did not have any ID on them and that they were of age or said some other excuse, this was not questioned and they would be sold vaping products. On the occasions were young people were refused sale, young people got to know which shops and which staff were less compliant with legislation.



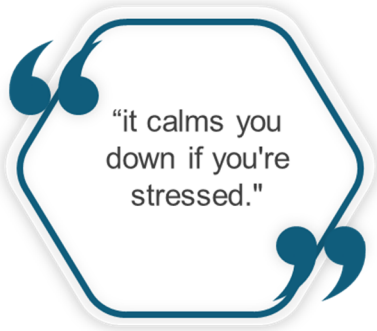


> **They know most kids who like do it are young but they don't care because they're getting profit from it and that's why I think loads of corner shops and all have actually got them in. And each sort of shop you go into there are always vapes cause that's where they're making their most money from at the minute.**
>
> **Female vaper, aged 15**

Perceived pros and cons of vape use

Young people had mixed views with regards to the pros and cons of vaping. Main benefits mentioned was that vapes were a good coping mechanism and the social aspect.

> **It's quite a social thing, like Friday after school everyone goes into town, goes get vapes and you know, can you get one for me, let me try yours and all that.**
>
> **Male vaper, aged 15**



Others thought the variety of flavours and tastes was a benefit. Some viewed vapes as being healthier compared to traditional cigarettes and; an aid to help people stop smoking cigarettes.

There was a general acknowledgement among young people that the health implications associated with vaping was a major disadvantage of vape use *"the aftermath, like what will happen later on" male never-vaper, aged 12.* Health risks mentioned included lung damage; cancer; respiratory problems; and gum disease. Young people also acknowledged that nicotine is a highly addictive substance causing cravings and dependency.

> **If you don't have one you're just going around begging for one if you are really addicted.**
>
> — Male past-vaper, aged 13

> **The way people turn to it for like stress relief and all it probably doesn't last that long, the same like the way some people drink and all like, it doesn't last forever it only lasts a while, and that's what makes you addicted.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 15

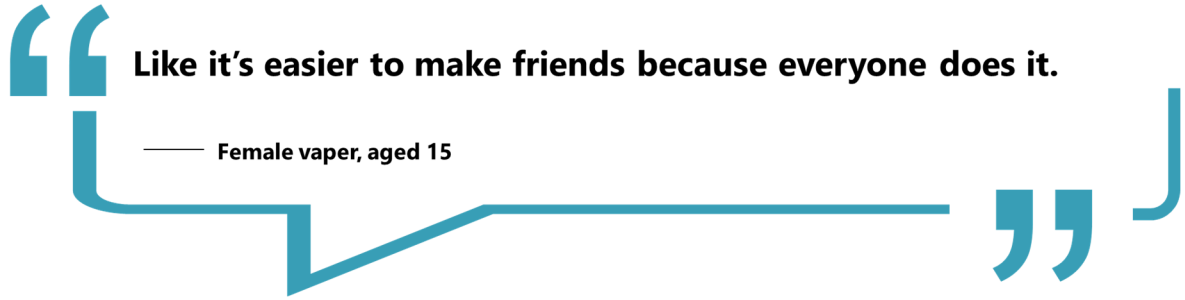
Impact on fitness levels was also considered a disadvantage. A number of male vapers recalled their personal experience of how it had impacted on their sporting performance *"it can impact your fitness, like a lot, and make you slower, weaker muscles and everything" male vaper, aged 15… "less stamina" male vaper, aged 15.*

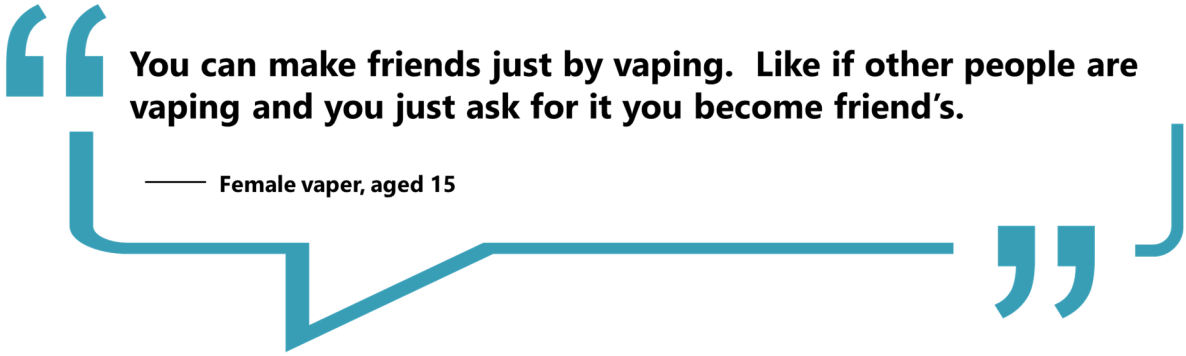
A few young people mentioned the financial impact, and not knowing the long-term effects of vaping as disadvantageous.

Socialising with peers

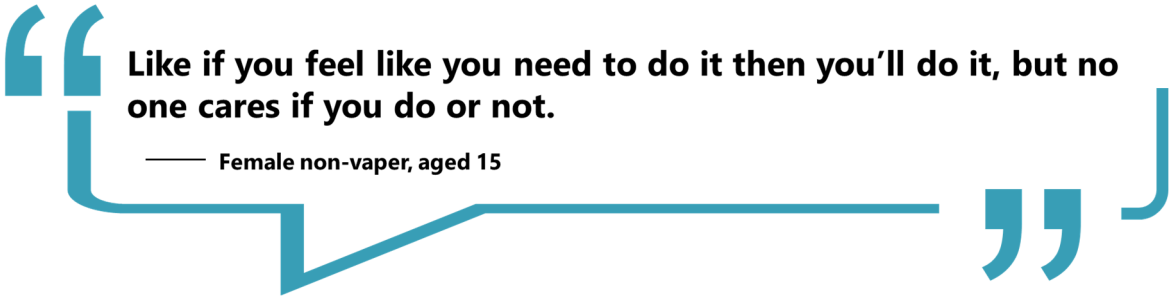
There were mixed views among young people on whether vaping status made any difference to how young people socialise with their peers. Non-vapers were more likely to say no that it made no difference, whereas vapers were of the view that yes it did make a difference.

For those who vaped, vaping was a social experience which facilitated bonding and forming new friendships with other young people who vaped.





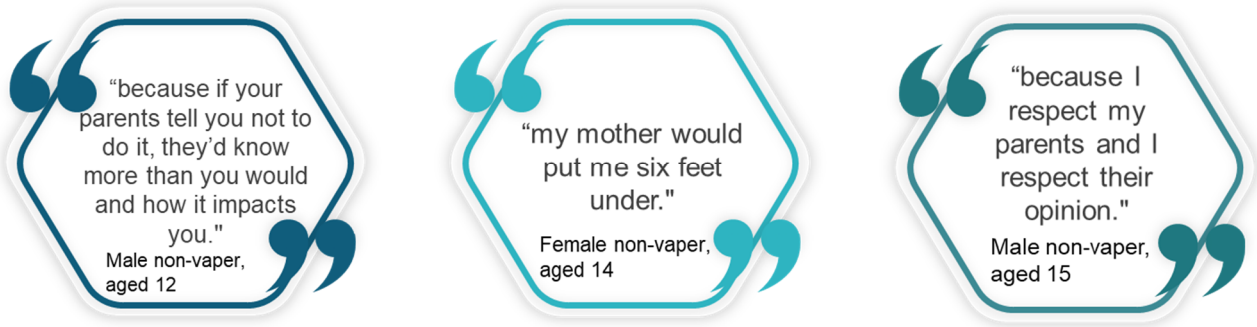
There was also a general view that as vaping had become normalised, people did not care if you vaped or not.



> **Because some people vape, then I think some people don't care as much and respect other people don't do it.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

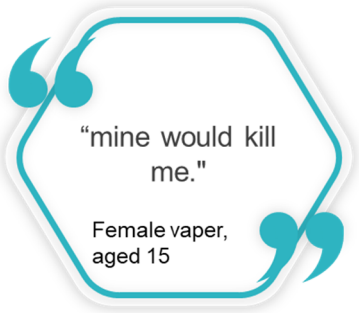
If influenced by parents/guardians views on vaping

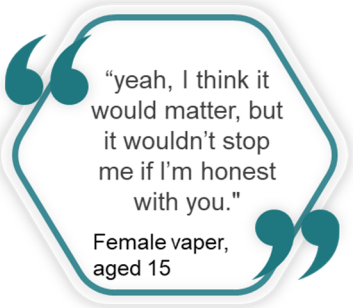
Most young people commented that their parent's/guardian's opinion on vaping had or would influence their decision on whether to vape or not. Non-vapers were more likely to consider how their parents would feel and react, so therefore choose not to vape.



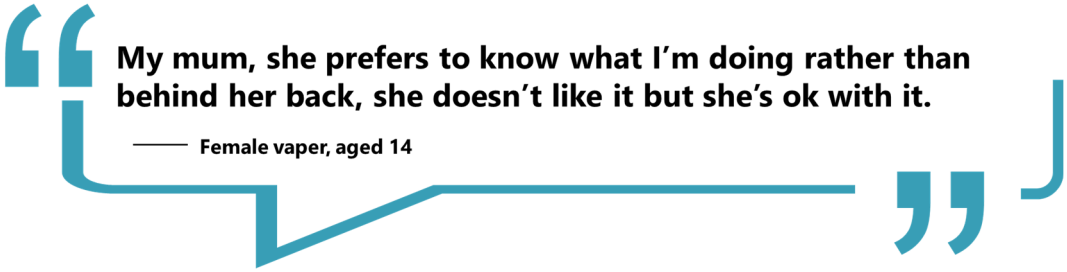
The majority of vapers hid the fact that they vaped from their parents/guardians. Those who vaped commented that their parents would be disappointed and for some would result in consequences if they were caught vaping.

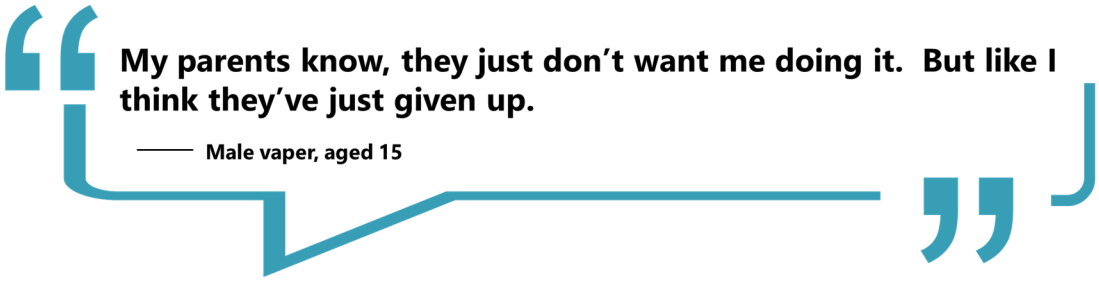
> **So like you want to keep a good relationship because if they find out you are vaping and then they're not happy with that and then you're not allowed out with your friends and things like that.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15



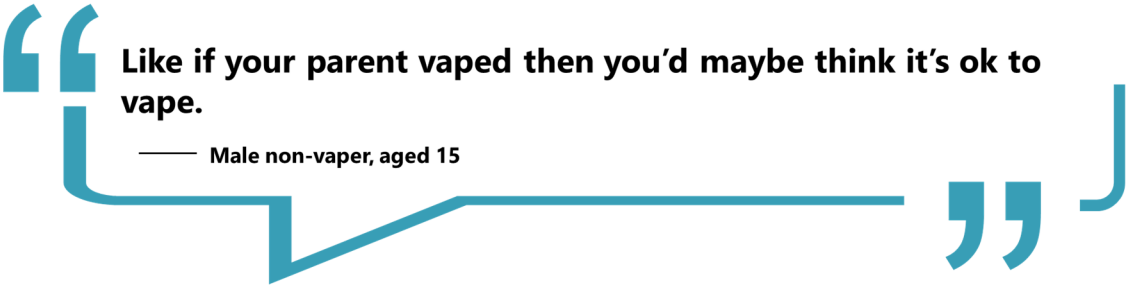


However, among the few participants who mentioned that their parent/s already knew that they vaped, this did not influence them to quit vaping.





A few participants commented that if you have parents who vaped this may have a positive influence on their vaping behaviour.



> **Both my parents smoke and toke so it's like I don't really care what they have to say because they do it and they can't really say anything to me.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 17

Vaping prevalence

Prevalence within friendship groups

Youth vaping prevalence varied significantly by age among friendship groups. When asked how many of their friends vape, estimated vaping prevalence was typically lower among those aged 12 to 13 years with prevalence increasing by age group (14 to 15 and those aged 17 years).

Among those aged 12 to 13 years, vaping prevalence among their friendship group varied by vaping status of participant. Never-vapers were likely to have a friendship group that were also non-vapers whereas those who vaped were more likely to report that half of their friends vaped.

Among those aged 14 to 15 years, both vapers and never-vapers were likely to report that either half or the majority (80%) of their friends vaped. Only a small number of vapers reported that all their friends vaped. Those aged 17 years were more likely to report that 80%-100% of their friends vaped.

Prevalence within year group and school

The majority of participants estimated that at least 70-75% of pupils within their year group vaped. Those in the lower year groups were more likely to give a higher estimation of prevalence throughout the school, ranging from 60% to 90% compared to those in the 6th form who estimated around 60%. Older participants were of the view that prevalence was lower among those in the lower year groups (Year 8 and 9) and more prevalent among older pupils.

Age-group most associate vaping with

There was overall agreement among participants that they would mostly associate vaping with teenagers.

First experience of vapes

In general, the vast majority of participants had been offered a vape to try. On most occasions they had been offered one by friends or fellow pupils when in school or at parties. A few mentioned that strangers had just come up to them in the street or at concerts asking if they wanted to try it.

> **It was like in the bathroom, you just walk in and they say you want a hit and all.**
>
> — Male never-vaper, aged 12

> **Parties, concerts, even when you're out with your mates in town.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **I was in town and this kid just came up to me and said like 'do you want to try this'.**
>
> — Female non-vaper, aged 15

Being offered a vape had made some feel uncomfortable or scared, with most feeling pressured to try it. However, a small number felt comfortable saying no or to turn and walk away. Others didn't mind at all as they were curious and wanted to try it.

> **Aye well you're a bit like what do I say, most people do it because it's put in their face; or if there's people standing around and they're looking at you.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 14

> **I just said no and just left.**
>
> — Male never-vaper, aged 12

Young people's perspectives on ease of being able to say no to vaping varied based on a range of factors including peer influence, individual personality traits; social acceptance and awareness of health risks.

> **It's not easy, it is pretty hard to say no.**
>
> — Male quit, aged 14

> **It's depending who's offering it to them... see if it was like a group of people all pressuring one person it would be obviously harder for them cause everybody's looking at them thinking they're gonna do it.**
>
> — Female never-vaper, aged 15

> **... and whenever you don't do it they're going like this 'oh you're scared, you're scared and all.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 15

> **Yeah, some people are trying to get you to do it more than others, some people would say like do you want this, no, ok, some others would be like take this and just keep going on til you've done it.**
>
> — Male never-vaper, aged 15

> **People are curious to see what it's like.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **I don't think it would be as easy as it used to be before it became a big trend.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 15

Trying a vape for the first time

The majority had first tried a vape either out of curiosity or because they had been influenced by friends and peers. Participants felt a mix of emotions when first trying a vape. Some felt curious about trying something new or discovering why it was so popular, others were apprehensive or felt uncomfortable, with some feeling a sense of regret after trying it.

> **I was uncomfortable, like I gave into the pressure.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **A bit guilty, just because you've never tried it and then say loads of people want to say they've never smoked or vaped and then you just take one and it kind of ruined it.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 14

First-time experiences varied with some reporting an enjoyable experience due to flavours and the novelty, while others experienced coughing, throat irritation, or dizziness. Some had been given vapes that contained other substances which they were unaware of at the time. Having experienced these effects some decided that vaping was not for them, while others continue to vape.

> **It was good, it just tasted nice.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **I liked the rush, it was a weird feeling, after a while there was a relief and then there was that feeling were you were dizzy for like 20/30 seconds and then it was back to normal, yeah.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **The one I smoked was a big proper e-cig and it was quite in the back of my throat, it was awful.**
>
> — Male quit, aged 15

> **My first time I had THC in mine and I ended up not very well, and didn't know that it was in it.**
>
> —— Female vaper, aged 14

Vaping behaviour

Type of device and flavours

Both vapers and non-vapers were equally aware of the variety of vaping devices available on the market. Among those participants who vape, disposable vape devices are the most commonly used, with Lost Mary's being the most common brand used. A few used Elf bars, Elux, Puff Bars or Crystal Bars.

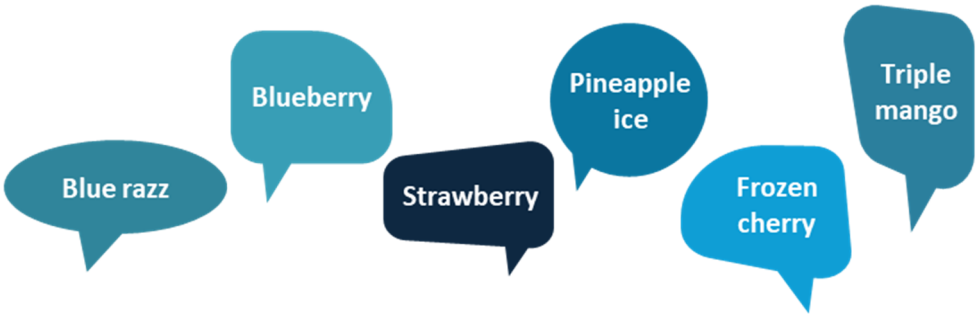
Disposable vape use was driven by factors such as the wide variety of appealing flavours and designs, along with the ease of access and use. They were also perceived to be relatively low cost and easy to conceal.

> **Disposables, they have more flavours and they're cheaper... refillable ones are more expensive...**
>
> —— Female vaper 1, aged 14
>
> **... they're easier to get.**
>
> —— Female vaper 2, aged 14

> **I used to use refills and then changed to disposables because they're easier to throw away... you don't have to worry about the oil running out and then the coil burning or anything like that, you don't have to charge it**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **You can't get caught with it cause they're easier to hide.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 15

Fruit flavours were the most popular among young vapers, with berry flavours being commonly cited, followed by pineapple and mango.



The highest legal nicotine concentration of 20mg/2% was the most commonly used amongst participants.

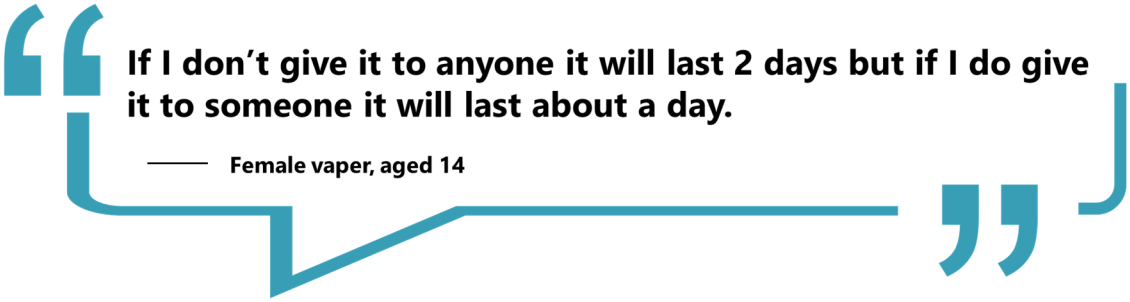
Important factors when selecting device or flavours

Among current users, most choose vape devices based on the flavour, with some choosing devices based on how long it lasts/number of puffs. For a few the nicotine content was the most important factor with participants being drawn to those containing the highest strength of nicotine. Price was mentioned by a few as a decisive factor.

Frequency of use and spend

The majority of participants vaped on a daily basis, with some acknowledging that they vaped at every opportunity. A small number reported that they only vaped occasionally, this would generally be when at social gatherings or parties. A female vaper highlighted that some girls would prioritise vaping over eating during their lunch break.

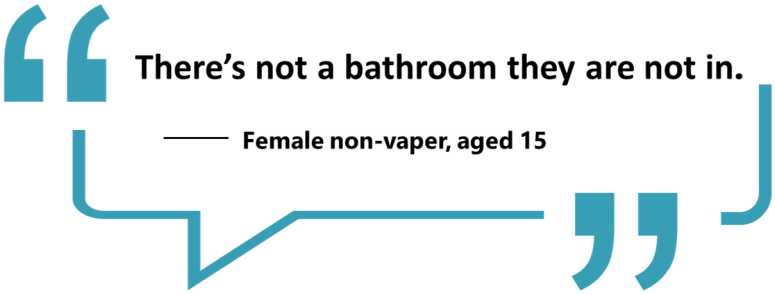
There was variance in the number of vapes young people would use within a week, ranging from a few puffs to several vapes a week. For regular users the number could vary between one to three per week, depending on whether they had only used the vape themselves or if shared it among others. This also depended on frequency of use during the day. A few acknowledged that they may go through one disposable vape a day. Of those who purchased vapes, weekly spend ranged from £5 to £40.



Common places to vape

Young vapers acknowledged that they would vape in various locations, such as at parties, concerts, or social events; when down town; at youth club; at home or when in friend's houses.

There was overall consensus among all participants that school bathrooms were the most common place for young people to use vapes when on school premises.



> **Sometimes when I go into the cubicle you just see boxes of vapes that are just opened.**
>
> — Male never-vaper, aged 12

A few vapers had been bold enough to vape in class, and a few participants commented that they had seen fellow pupils vaping in class.

Awareness of impact of vaping in school

Awareness varied among young people regarding the impact vaping had on others, particularly in school bathrooms. Some are aware of how their actions impact their peers and the school environment, recognising that vaping can lead to discomfort for non-users. Whereas, some believed it was socially acceptable therefore not realising the impact it had on those around them.

> **It's not nice, like you walk in it sort of hits you in the face.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 17

> **It's just normal, no one really cares.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 17

> **Sometimes I don't even go to the bathroom because they vape in it.**
>
> — Female never-vaper, aged 12

Some non-vapers were concerned of being in the wrong place at the wrong time if people are caught vaping, or being associated with vaping if in the company of those who vape. Some commented on how difficult it was to access toilets at break times due to the number of pupils vaping in cubicles. Others did not like being exposed to and the effects of inhaling second-hand vapour.

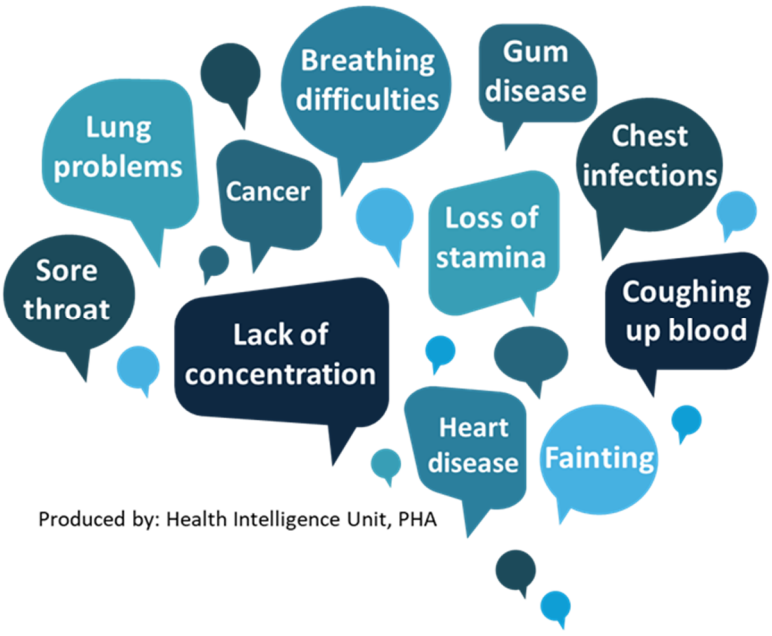
> **It's really bad cause you walk in and you just start coughing cause you can see all the smoke everywhere as well.**
>
> **Male non-vaper, aged 15**

There was a general consensus among never-vapers that classes were disrupted with people asking out to go to the bathroom to vape. A number of vapers acknowledged that they would ask out of class as they had the urge to vape.

Awareness of health risks

Health risks

Participants had a mixed level of knowledge regarding the short-term and long-term health risks associated with vaping. Specific risks mentioned included:



The majority of vapers commented that they had experienced prolonged side effects from using vapes, such as headaches; difficulty breathing; gum disease and skin irritation.

A number of vapers who had younger brothers and sisters commented that they would not want them vaping and would try and discourage them from using vapes.

> **I would explain to them like the danger of it and like make them understand the risks. Like try and put them off it.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

There were mixed views on second-hand vapour and the effect this may have on your health. Some were of the opinion that it was bad for your health, while others thought that it was fine to inhale as there was no effect or less of an effect from second-hand vapour compared to first-hand vapour.

> **I think most people think as long as you're not smoking it straight from the e-cigarette it's not going to harm you.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

Some felt uncomfortable when in the midst of a lot of vapour, and would either leave the room or withdraw from their friendship group whilst they were vaping.

> **I would rather not be exposed to it, it makes me a bit uncomfortable so if someone started to I'd maybe leave, or if they are with me I would sometimes ask them to stop but sometimes I just leave and don't hang out with them while they're doing it.**
>
> — Male never-vaper, aged 15

Ingredients

Most participants had a basic understanding of vape ingredients, recognising common components like nicotine and flavourings and that vapes contain harmful chemicals. However, their knowledge about the range of ingredients tends to be limited and they often have misconceptions around actual contents. Ingredients cited included:

Although most participants are aware that vapes contain various amounts of nicotine, there is a lack of awareness with regards to the level of nicotine in vapes compared to that in traditional cigarettes. Most were shocked and alarmed to learn that the nicotine in one standard disposable vape with the highest legal nicotine level of 20mg/ml is around the same as that in a pack of 20 cigarettes.

> **I know there are people who would smoke a pack of 20 cigarettes a day but with a vape if feels like taking less.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **I am shocked, I use one about every 30 seconds.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 15

Nicotine addiction

There was a general consensus among both vapers and non-vapers that nicotine is an addictive substance. Participants described symptoms of nicotine addiction in various ways, drawing from their personal experiences or those of their friends. Common descriptions included: always having a vape on them, leaving class to vape or taking the risk to vape in class. Some described getting agitated, anxious or having difficulty concentrating when not able to vape.

Other substances

The majority of participants are aware that substances other than nicotine can be used in vapes. Only a few had direct experience of using vapes for this purpose, while some know peers who use/used vapes to take substances such as Spice, THC, CBD and Weed. The majority had heard about it through friends and/or social media. Worryingly, a number had commented on friends having been ill from unknowingly taking a vape which contained other substances.

> **One of my mates boked after it like, some boy just came up to him and was all you want to try this here mate and just gave it to him and walked off and it was pure spice and he started boking everywhere and you couldn't leave him, he couldn't stop.**
>
> — Male quit, aged 13

Education on health risks associated with vape use

Young people had been informed about the risks of vaping through various channels, with the majority having been informed through school, either via special assemblies or during classroom lessons, were teachers addressed vaping and tobacco use. Some schools had engaged with voluntary organisations such as Cancer Focus and other health professionals who delivered school-based programmes which often included interactive lessons and discussions. Discussions highlighted that parents and family members also played a role in educating young people about vaping, through open dialogue or by expressing their concerns. A small number had viewed videos on social media platforms, such a TikTok,

were health advocates and influencers had conveyed messages about the negative health effects associated with vaping.

When asked their views on educational resources being made available to inform young people about the health consequences of vaping, the majority felt that educational resources would not help those who already engage in vaping. However, some were of the view that potential resources may deter those who have never vaped from trying it, or make some people begin to think about quitting vaping.

Promotion of vapes

All participants (vapers and non-vapers) acknowledged having been exposed to the promotion of vapes. Social media was the most common medium, with influencers and trends glamorising vaping on platforms such as TikTok, SnapChat, Instragram and YouTube. Young people were also exposed to colourful pop-up adverts for the sale of vapes on social media platforms as well as on other on-line platforms.

> **Because the people were smoking like ones and it was coming out like colourful smoke and all but then people ended up getting them and it wasn't anything like that but now they're all addicted.** — Female vaper, aged 15
>
> **...and then they did tricks and all like.**

> **Sometimes it's just on your YouTube page, people would come up and like they're vaping and it looks cool and all. I think that's how it became a big trend.**
>
> — Female non-vaper, aged 15

> **On-line, a bit of both social media and ads popping up.**
>
> — Male non-vaper, aged 15

Young people also highlighted that they were regularly exposed to the marketing of vapes with retailers showcasing their vapes in front-facing product displays, also on posters and signs within and outside local shops. Adverts were also displayed at bus stations, bus stops and on the side of buses. Some local vape retailers promoted their shop and merchandise on the side of their car. Some young people commented that they received adverts in the post from local retailers.

> **Any shop I go in I see like one part where they're selling vapes.**
>
> — Female non-vaper, aged 15

> **In shops and it tells you the name of flavours and all that, or they do discounts like 5 for £20 and all.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 15

> **Yeah, you get them in the post from vape shops.**
>
> — Male non-vaper, aged 15

When asked about the messaging within adverts, the vast majority of participants felt that these were targeted at young people and in particular teenagers. The general view was that the vape product name; product design; the bright colourful packaging; characters used on brand imagery and; wide range of flavours such as fruit flavours and those which resembled sweets and soft drinks made them appealing to young people and these products were specifically aimed at youth.

> **I feel like they are targeting kids because they have flavours like cotton candy, like do you think an adult would want to be vaping cotton candy, really.**
>
> — Male non-vaper, aged 15

> **I work in a shop that sells them and one of the flavours is literally like Gummy Bears so like its aimed at kids.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 17

> **It's all really targeted at our age.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 14

Plain packaging

Young people had mixed views regarding plain packaging as a deterrent to vaping, however there were several common themes that emerged in discussion. There was a general consensus among young people that branding and packaging contribute

significantly to the appeal of vaping products. Some were of the view that plain packaging may make these products less visually appealing, potentially reducing their appeal among young people.

Some were of the opinion that plain packaging may deter those who have not yet tried vapes. Whereas, plain packaging may not be enough to deter those who already vape and have established preferences for certain brands or flavours, as familiarity may offset the aesthetic look of the packaging.

> **If you're already addicted it doesn't matter what the packaging looks like but I think for someone who hasn't vaped before.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 14

> **If they like change the boxes now it wouldn't do anything because people already know what it is.**
>
> — Female never-vaper, aged 12

The effectiveness of warning labels or graphic images on plain packaging was also discussed. Opinions varied, with some participants being of the view that warnings on packaging or on devices themselves could have a more significant impact on deterring young people from buying and using vapes, but this would mainly be young people who had not started vaping. Others believed that health warnings and graphic images would not have any impact as this was already on cigarette packaging and people still smoked.

> **Well like the way the cigarettes have like warning symbols, like you may get cancer and pictures and all, like they are quite intimidating.**
>
> — Male never-vaper, aged 12

> **I don't really think it would do much because my nanny smokes, like it always has images about what happens to people who smoke and she doesn't really care about it.**
>
> —— Female never-vaper, aged 12

> **Probably for people who haven't done it before it would probably scare them, but for those who currently smoke they still go out and buy them soit would be the same for people who vape.**
>
> —— Male vaper, aged 14

Quitting vaping

Perceptions of how easy it is to quit vaping varied among young people. The majority of non-vapers thought that it would be difficult for people to quit vaping. There were mixed views among those who currently vape. A few believed that quitting would be easy and that they would be able to stop any time they wanted to, especially if they haven't been using vapes for long or haven't developed a strong dependency. Others thought it would be difficult and the longer you have vaped, the more difficult it would be.

A few young people had attempted to quit vaping. For some it was easy,

> **It was like 4 days... Get it out of your system and then after that it gets easier.**
>
> —— Male quit, aged 15

while others found it difficult, especially being regularly exposed to friends and peers vaping, or because of cravings.

> **It's everywhere around you and you be tempted because you see everyone doing it, it smells nice and you're just like one more time.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 14

> **You would try and quit but then you would go into the bathroom ... and someone would offer you it and you would just take it.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 14

> **I found it hard as was craving it so started again.**
>
> — Female vaper, aged 15

Those who tried to quit have done so due to health concerns, either current health or uncertainty of potential future health risks associated with vaping. For others it was because of the negative impact it had on their physical performance especially in sports. Others quit because of financial reasons.

When asked if they would engage with a service to help them quit, only a few indicated that yes they would. Some said that they would only engage with services when older. The importance of confidentiality if attending a quit service was highlighted as a key factor.

Among those who said they would not engage with services, social embarrassment and fear of judgement from friends and peers was one of the main reasons given for reluctance to engage with services. Some would prefer to receive support from family and friends.

> **People might tease them for it, not even their friendship group, other people in school.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

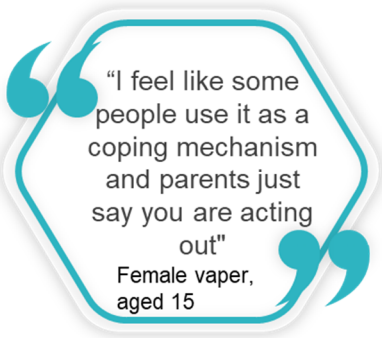
> **They feel embarrassed about staff helping them.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

> **Probably not, not like from public health agency or charities or stuff, maybe from family or whatever.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15
>
> **Yeah, from family and friends.**
>
> — Male vaper, aged 15

How others perceive youth vaping

Young people were of the view that adults did not understand why young people vape. Some were of the view that adults do not understand that young people have a lot to deal with (such as school, family, friendships and maybe work), and that they may be struggling to cope and therefore use vaping as a calming and coping mechanism to take their mind off things.


“no, I don’t think peer pressure was as bad back when they were wee ones."
Female vaper, aged 14


“I feel like some people use it as a coping mechanism and parents just say you are acting out"
Female vaper, aged 15


“they just assume it’s a medium to fit in or to look cool."
Female vaper, aged 17


Key findings
from Interviews
with Teaching
Staff

Estimated prevalence of vaping

Teachers had mixed views on the number of pupils who vaped in their school. Whilst some suggested it was a small proportion per year group (e.g five to fifteen pupils in each year group), others felt the problem was much bigger, indicating it could range from 10% to 50% of pupils in their school who vape.

There was a general acknowledgement amongst teachers about the difficulty in providing an estimate of the proportions who vape. A few teachers highlighted that the estimate they provided was based on the numbers they catch vaping, but they believed the number who actually vape is significantly higher. It was felt this was due to pupil's ability to conceal vapes. It was also suggested there is a difference between pupils who experiment with vapes and those who vape regularly.

> **We know probably, the number that we actually catch is very low compared to the number that are doing it.**
>
> — Teacher 14, Secondary School, Urban

> **It's a bit like smoking in the old days, there would be a hardcore group of kids who would be vaping and then there's that fringe group who are trying it out and experimenting with it.**
>
> — Teacher 11, Secondary School, Rural

For some teachers, there was a feeling that the numbers who are vaping has been increasing, and they highlighted how this was a growing concern within their school. However, a small proportion of teachers believed there has been a decline in the number of children vaping in school. It was felt this was due to the enforcement of school policy on vaping and increased monitoring to detect vaping within the school.

> **It's expanded exponentially over the last couple of years. Definitely since we've come back after COVID it's been a really, really big problem and it creates other problems with it.**
>
> — Teacher 5, Grammar School, Urban

> **It's definitely getting worse, more and more people I think are using the vapes, ... we noticed in the past three years especially now that the numbers have increased significantly and it certainly has taken a turn for the worse this year especially, it has risen markedly since this time last year I would say.**
>
> — Teacher 10, Grammar School, Urban

> **We have noticed a real decline really, especially this year in school. Once it kind of got introduced, our school enforced quite a strict policy around vaping and I think that really deterred a lot of the pupils.**
>
> — Teacher 10, Grammar School, Urban

Typical young people who vape

Teachers had varying opinions on the 'typical' young person who would vape. Some talked about underachievers who have poor behaviour in general and are disruptive in class or are disengaged from school. One teacher suggested those with other ongoing issues, e.g. mental health problems, were typically more likely to vape.

> **I don't mean to sound dreadful, but the kids that I would find vaping are children who are, behavior is on a trajectory which is poor, they can be disruptive in class, they can be disengaged in class, they can be both em and eh, they certainly are vaping almost as a badge of honour.**
>
> Teacher 11, Secondary School, Rural

> **There's definitely self-esteem issues, there's definite confidence and you know how they view themselves, they definitely have emotional issues and I would say now they have started that (vaping) and it's become a habit.**
>
> Teacher 14, Grammar School, Urban

There was a lack of consensus over which gender and age group are more likely to vape. It was felt both boys and girls vape, however there were differing views on who was more likely to. It was also suggested that pupils aged 15+ years were more likely to vape, however there were still concerns about younger pupils vaping.

It was clear from interviews with teachers it is hard to pinpoint a 'typical' pupil who vapes, highlighting how vaping has become more acceptable among young people. Indeed, a number of teachers recognised that there is no typical pupil who vapes and they felt that it is no longer just associated with risk-takers and the more academic, studious or sporty pupil could equally be found vaping.

> **We have people who are using vapes who are otherwise good pupils who don't get into trouble, some of them are high achievers, fairly studious, they're not people who would be getting into bother for other issues. Now some of the pupils who do vape have other issues they are involved in as well, but it's certainly not the case that only those, you know inverted commas, bold pupils are the ones vaping, that's certainly not the case.**
>
> Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

> **There's no such thing as a typical student... Children who would ordinarily be quite compliant, children who would normally not be the type of child who would break rules. Children who maybe would be hardworking and studious and successful in terms of their exam results. So what we're finding now is that more and more children of different types are vaping.**
>
> — Teacher 6, Secondary School, Urban

> **There is no typical student that vapes, it's right across the student population. You would think maybe stereotypically it would be people who would be from disadvantaged homes and disruptive or whatever, but no, it is wide spread. I've had some shocks as to who has been vaping in school.**
>
> — Teacher 8, Secondary School, Urban

Why young people vape

There were many reasons why teachers believed young people vaped. Teachers believed young people thought vapes were cool, particularly because of the tricks you can do with them. Vaping was seen as a trend and young people may be curious to try it, especially if other children their age are doing so. Some teachers talked about the social aspect of vaping and how young people engage with others when vaping. Others felt pupils may feel pressure from their peers to vape.

> **The tricks that they can do, so the blowing of the rings or whatever. So, there's kind of it's almost like a TikTok challenge type of thing, you know that kind of way.**
>
> — Teacher 3, Grammar School, Urban

> **I think it was just totally peer pressure that somone had dared her to try it and she just was caught red handed basically, but I suppose that's maybe the scary side of it, that peer pressure is such a part of you know their life.**
>
> — Teacher 10, Grammar School, Urban

Others highlighted how the manufacturing and marketing of vapes play a key role in young people vaping. Some believed that the flavours, colours and packaging of vapes are attractive to young people and entice them to vape. It was also felt that young people can easily access vapes. Furthermore, a few teachers discussed how social media figures can influence young people and encourage them to vape.

> **Young people are being manipulated by these strawberry flavours and flavoury flavours and packaging, I mean why an adult who, I suppose are these things not designed for people who want to get off cigarettes you know, but they are clearly being marketed at young people, that's part of the problem too, through the packaging and the taste.**
>
> — Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

> **They have all sorts of sweet appealing flavours. The appearance of them. They are heavily marketed towards young people and making them attractive.**
>
> — Teacher 4, Grammar School, Urban

Some teachers suggested that vaping was simply a way of rebelling from school rules and pupils enjoyed engaging in risky behaviours. A few also believed that vaping was a mechanism for young people to deal with other issues they were facing, such as self-esteem, anxiety and other emotional issues.

> **There's a sense either to manage their emotions because we can see a correlation with children who are having a lot of emotional issues going on or their vaping is causing it and its affecting them in a way where this is the output... We're just not sure which way it is.**
>
> — Teacher 4, Grammar School, Urban

> **For some students it might relieve some anxiety.**
>
> — Teacher 2, Grammar School, Urban

A few teachers also discussed how vaping was not seen as dangerous like traditional smoking. It was felt young people were unaware of the potential health implications due to the lack of information on the harms of vaping compared to smoking.

> **I personally believe they don't think there's health risks attached to it.**
>
> — Teacher 1, Grammar School, Urban

Accessing vapes

The majority of teachers believed young people accessed vapes via shops. It was also felt that the sharing culture around vapes made it easy for young people to get access to them. A few believed that young people use the black market to purchase vapes, or get them from others such as siblings or friends.

Whilst not widespread, a few teachers talked about a small cohort of pupils using illegal substances in vapes, but these appear to have been isolated instances.

Where young people vape in school

Teachers identified school toilets as the main place young people vaped in school. This was viewed as a problematic area and could be disruptive as people asked out of lessons to be able to vape in the bathrooms. Furthermore, this also made it difficult for teachers to 'police' due to privacy issues. Teachers felt toilets seemed to be a social place for pupils to gather and vape and this had an impact on pupils who do not vape.

> **Vaping takes place in toilets and in terms of safeguarding issues it's very difficult to catch students if they are using them in toilets.**
>
> — Teacher 13, Grammar School, Urban

> **The toilets and vaping seem to go unfortunately hand in hand. And then unfortunately they're in the toilets, and then some girls even feel that it's such a social area that they take their lunch in there.**
>
> —— Teacher 7, Secondary School, Rural

> **In the bathrooms is the main place they vape and yeah, sometimes in cubicles and then sometimes in areas that can't be seen, we haven't really come across many people vaping outside the school you know in the school grounds, that doesn't seem to be an issue, on one rare occasion we had two girls vaping on a corridor, they thought it was quit isolated, you know they wouldn't be seen, but I would say nearly all the vaping takes place in bathrooms.**
>
> —— Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

Other less frequently mentioned places teachers identified were school buses and the bus waiting area; outside in general and P.E. changing rooms.

Impact of vaping on behaviour

Teachers highlighted that young people who vape ask out of lessons to use the bathrooms, which is disruptive. There was also a concern that vaping impacts on their concentration levels and can have a detrimental impact on their academic achievement.

> **We find lots of pupils are asking out of lessons, now that can be number one possibly because people are looking out to vape, or number two, genuine pupils who haven't been able to use the bathroom at the right times and they need to go and they have to ask out of lessons then. But it has been noted by some staff that the same pupils are asking out and there would be suspicion there that they are asking out to go and vape.**
>
> — Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

> **I think some of them could be affected in terms of their ability to concentrate. I think the concentration definitely. Again, I'll go back to my core in Year 11, I think concentration is affected So I think it affects them in ways... their ability to sort of stay settled on their work, to complete their work, I think is affect.**
>
> — Teacher 4, Grammar School, Urban

Some teachers described health impacts they have seen amongst pupils who vape. This included, headaches; sore throat; paleness; and dizziness. One teacher also felt that vaping can impact upon energy and fitness levels.

A few teachers noted that they had not seen a change in behaviour due to vaping, with one describing how those who vape tend to be underachievers so it has not influenced or caused a change in how they interact in school. It was also acknowledged that it is difficult to attribute changes to vaping as there could be other causes.

> **I suppose in school with young people there's lots of things that can affect their behavior but we couldn't necessarily put it down to use of e-cigarettes... we wouldn't contribute it to one thing, it would be a combination of things.**
>
> — Teacher 2, Grammar School, Urban

Impact on pupils who don't vape

Many teachers described how vaping within school can impact upon pupils who don't vape. The most common problem identified was how school toilets can be an intimidating place for pupils who don't vape, particularly younger pupils. It was highlighted that they can be reluctant to use the toilets during school time due to being uncomfortable around others who vape, or afraid of being associated with people who vape if they are found in their presence when teachers are monitoring bathrooms. It was evident that some pupils refrain from using the toilets at all during the school day.

> **We are getting reports, particularly young kids who found it intimidating going in, and that group of older boys and girls in the toilets and they (young children) were put off by going to the toilets at lunch time and break.**
>
> — Teacher 11, Secondary School, Urban

> **Some of the pupils, especially the younger ones tell us that they are reluctant to go into bathrooms because there may be three or four of five boys standing around vaping, they feel intimidated because they are older number one, and number two, there is no privacy to use the bathroom.**
>
> — Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

> **We are now conscious that a lot of boys are going through the school day without using the toilet and the reason is that they do feel intimidated when they go to the toilets.**
>
> — Teacher 1, Grammar School, Urban

In addition to this, some teachers also described how classes are disrupted due to others asking out of lessons to use the toilets. This also interrupts teaching time and can affect learning time for other students.

> **If those children are out for a couple of minutes or the lessons are disrupted as there's this sort of in and out of the lessons because at the end of the day you can't challenge them and say, do you need to go because that would be unfair. And again, coming back particularly to our female pupil, you just let them go... vapers who are needing to get in and out and that's disruptive to the flow of the lesson.**
>
> **Teacher 4, Grammar School, Urban**

Young people's understanding of the risks of vaping

Some teachers felt that young people were unaware of the risks of vaping and described how pupils were shocked at some of the information they received during talks from external agencies, or from teachers themselves.

> **We had a woman in from (external organisation) which was about smoking and then they had introduced a new part to it this term which was about vaping and again the pupils were really surprised, you know even some of the findings, how many unknowns actually.**
>
> **Teacher 10, Grammar School, Rural**

There was a feeling that young people perceive vaping to be safer than general tobacco smoking, particularly due to the position of NHS England which promotes vapes as a smoking cessation tool. It was felt that young people do not think about the side effects or the potential long-term impact of vaping.

> **I think they all know the dangers of smoking and they know smoking is bad for you and it causes you illnesses particularly cancer and all sorts, but I don't think it registers that vaping has similar consequences.**
>
> — Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

A few teachers described how pupils in their school were aware of the risks of vaping due to information they have received during school, but do not see themselves as addicted. Some young people were also able to challenge teachers about the perceived risks of vaping.

> **As a school we do huge amounts of actively educating them and we bring in external groups and everything else… I think the ongoing issue is it's still not seen by many as the same as smoking.**
>
> — Teacher 5, Grammar School, Urban

Education in schools about vaping

All teachers were asked about what education is available to pupils in school about vaping. The majority of teachers said their schools have brought in external speakers from community and voluntary organisations such as Chest, Heart and Stroke and Cancer Focus; other organisations like the PSNI, or medical professionals, to talk about the dangers of vaping. It was highlighted that this approach was more effective than teachers approaching the topic as it was felt it carried more 'weight' and young people respected the voice of external speakers more.

> **We've got externals because sometimes hearing somebody else, a different voice when they see such and such doing something, they think it's important.**
>
> — Teacher 9, Grammar School, Urban

> **It really did have an impact on them more so than me speaking to them or one of their other teachers. They saw them as medical professionals, dressed in their medical professional attire, speaking to them about anti-vaping and knowing that they see these things and that their job isn't just to be in school all day, you know. It was very effective.**
>
> — Teacher 8, Secondary School, Urban

Alongside this, some teachers highlighted that personal development classes cover vaping. However, it was acknowledged that resources need updating to give more relevant information on vaping. Indeed, a few teachers have actively tried to source information themselves to be able to educate children but they felt there needed to be a bank of resources available to all schools.

> **As part of our school development plan we've just undertaken a major review of our PD curriculum and certainly this area we will be looking for external assistance because we have as I said, we have noticed it's a larger problem and whilst we can try and deal with it in terms of the issue of sensors, alongside, there has to be a good education programme that the students know the dangers and that, something that we want to look at again.**
>
> — Teacher 13, Grammar School, Urban

> **At the minute events have gone too fast for the resources so we are really trying to create resources ourselves but it would be great if there were resources for everybody, all schools, about the health implications, you know just everything around vaping, a good bank about preventative resources, I think that's what schools need at the minute.**
>
> —— Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

School assemblies have also been used to provide education on vaping. These have been prepared either by teachers or by pupils.

> **And myself and another couple of the senior leaders in school, we take assemblies so we all did the different year groups on vaping, and we really focused on pop-corn lung and the chemicals and stuff that's in them, and how bad it was for you.**
>
> —— Teacher 8, Secondary School, Urban

> **We have different year groups in assembly each day Monday through Thursday and they all did an assembly about vaping in general and the law and health potential, health implications and so on from research that was done and then the school policy. So they were given that in assemblies plus that was passed through form tutors as well, and they do it in their personal development programmes, so they can get it through quite a lot of things, it's not just a one off.**
>
> —— Teacher 2, Grammar School, Urban

How schools and teaching staff deal with vaping

The majority of teachers interviewed described how toilets are monitored in their school either by teaching staff and/or cleaning staff as a mechanism for enforcing no vaping within school grounds.

Some teachers (n=8) said their school had a formal policy which was enforced by staff. Generally, this tended to be part of a wider smoking and drugs policy, and not a specific vaping policy. A few said vaping fell within a general behaviour policy. Policies were available on school websites and in pupil diaries. It was recognised that before there was a policy which referred to vaping, it was difficult to enforce a no vaping approach in school.

To try and combat vaping within the school setting, a few teachers described how they restrict bathroom access during classes. Others talked about installing vaping sensors/ detectors but it was felt these were too expensive for schools to be able to use widely.

Teachers described a number of difficulties enforcing no vaping in school. It was highlighted that it could be particularly difficult to identify the culprit in a group setting due to the nature of vapes and their easy concealment. This meant it was hard to actually catch pupils vaping in the act. One teacher described how this meant it was hard to punish pupils as they need to catch pupils in possession of a vape and it is difficult to enforce if there is no concrete evidence. Toilet areas were highlighted as an area which was difficult to manage. Another teacher also said that they need to get permission from parents to get pupils to empty their pockets and bags, and this is something which needs done in the presence of another staff member. It was also highlighted that legislation does not specifically say that vapes should not be used in enclosed spaces, so this made it harder to enforce a no vaping message. In addition to this, the message that vapes are a smoking cessation tool from NHS England also makes it difficult.

> **The staff were saying recently the problem is now the odourless vapes that they have. Before they said you went in and you could smell fruit or strawberries or whatever but now actually you go in, you know that someone is vaping in the toilets but you have no way of proving who it is because of, you know it's odourless or colourless.**
>
> Teacher 10, Grammar School, Urban

> **Whenever I started the actual vaping devices were the size of a cigarette case so they were quite bulky so whenever they had them in their jacket pocket, you'd see it, whereas now because they're pen like it's very easy to disguise.**
>
> Teacher 13, Grammar School, Urban

> **We can't insist the pupils would empty their pockets, if we want to do that we would have to contact parents and do it in the presence of parents so it's a fine line there that we have to be careful and respect the rights of the pupils, they don't have to empty their pockets if we ask them to.**
>
> Teacher 12, Secondary School, Rural

Punishment for being caught vaping in school varied. Some teachers (n=6) said pupils would face detention, followed by suspension if caught again; whilst others (n=6) said those caught would be immediately suspended. In some instances, parents would be brought in for meetings with the Principal after detention/ suspension. One teacher described how sanctions are also given to anyone found in the presence of someone who is vaping.

It was also noted that there is a limitation as to what teachers can do to deal with vaping. A few teachers felt their role has changed in recent years to monitor and deal with vaping and other issues and this takes away from their core teaching work.

Teachers described how parents have different awareness levels of vaping. Whilst some parents are unaware their child vapes, others are aware and supply their child with vapes and don't see it as a problem. Some staff described, how on occasion, following the confiscation of pupils vapes that a number of parents have contacted the school to ask that they return the vaping product/s to their sons or daughters.

Generally, teachers felt parents were supportive of the school enforcing no vaping. However, there was evidence of parents questioning the school on what it is doing about vaping, perhaps even blaming them for the issue.

Views on reversing the trend of vaping

The majority of teachers felt it would be difficult to reverse the trend of young people vaping, especially due to a lack of available evidence. It was felt that it could take a long time to reverse the current trend and it was believed preventative work is necessary to put young people off from beginning vaping and this should begin in primary school. Teachers felt schools needed more information and advice on how to deal with this problem. Some suggestions included more informative resources which place greater emphasis on health implications; information for parents and for the school board of governors. It was also suggested that the Education Authority could provide funding for vape alarms.

> **I think it's going to be a very slow reversal. I think once the education is embedded that over time that will have an impact, just like as it did with smoking. You're always going to have people who will vape and that's going to be a given. But I think when education programmes are embedded and over time, and especially if legislation comes on board in some shape or form that it will have an impact.**
>
> **Teacher 4, Grammar School, Urban**

Most teachers felt that education would be extremely important to addressing this issue. In particular, it was felt that more resources and more age appropriate material is needed. It was also highlighted that external speakers in schools is a good mechanism for discouraging vaping and explaining the facts to young people.

> **They need to be using the same tools that the vaping people are using amongst youngsters to make it as uncool as possible, to highlight the dangers, positive role models who openly condemn the idea and the concept of it all. All of that needs to happen along with education, along with the medical world, all singing from the same hymn sheet.**
>
> **Teacher 11, Secondary School, Rural**

> **It needs to be hard hitting. You know, we can't sort of like skirt about thinking that it's OK to say now don't do that. They need to know about the A, B's and C's of it. You know, the oral health, the popcorn lung, if that is a thing, about the oesophagus... they need to know the amount of chemicals, they need to know that. I think an awful lot of them don't think there's nicotine in them. I think there's a real, real proper lack of education around vaping.**
>
> — Teacher 7, Secondary School, Rural

> **The idea of this bank of worksheets, that just turns 17 year olds off, whereas if there's a video for 2 minutes of someone their own age as opposed to an adult talking about the dangers, so that, if you are thinking about resources from a school prospective that's what we would see as ideal, age appropriate, a lot of resources that might come out, I understand for younger children where there's worksheets and so on but the age group that we work with, the key thing for us is that it would be age appropriate.**
>
> — Teacher 13, Grammar School, Urban

It was also highlighted that it was important to recognise the limitations of what schools can do to address the problem. Teachers acknowledged the need for further regulation of the sale of vapes. Ideas included more government restrictions; increase the price of vapes; restricting sale of disposable vapes to under 18s and addressing how vapes are displayed in shops. It was also felt that it would be useful to have an advertising campaign on the dangers of vaping.

> **We can manage it in school but once they go out the door at half three you know we can't go home with them.**
>
> — Teacher 10, Grammar School, Urban

> **Having all the resources in the world isn't going to have any effect unless the Government takes action and takes drastic action about regulation, banning and deciding on tastes and smells and colours and design and things like that there.**
>
> **Teacher 8, Secondary School, Urban**

It was clear that reversing the trend would not be easy and would require time and a sustained effort to change the culture around vaping. When asked about their views on a service which could help young people stop vaping, there were mixed views. Whilst it was thought it could be good to signpost pupils who have been caught multiple times and provide information and support for those who would like to quit, others were unsure if young people would engage in a service.

Discussion

The rise of vaping among young people has become a public health concern. This has also drawn much attention from teaching staff and policymakers. This study explored the perceptions, behaviours and influences of young people vaping, and the perspectives of teaching staff regarding youth vaping, uncovering several key themes that highlight the complexities of this issue.

Youth perceptions/awareness

Results found that the majority of young people had heard of e-cigarettes before this study (98%). However, the awareness and knowledge of young people regarding the risks of vaping can vary based on several factors, including access to information, education, and peer influence.

Young people are aware of or had experience of some of the short-term risks associated with vaping such as respiratory issues. Many were aware that vaping can cause immediate effects such as irritation to the lungs and throat, which can result in coughing and breathlessness. Some had awareness of acute effects such as dizziness or headaches. Although the majority recognise that nicotine use can lead to addiction and dependency, there is a general lack of awareness that nicotine use affects brain development in adolescents impacting cognitive function, concentration and emotional regulation[28,29]. There is also a lack of understanding that nicotine use can increase the risk of developing or intensify mental health problems such as anxiety and depression[29].

Although young people are aware of some long-term risks associated with vaping such as the potential risk of lung cancer there is a general lack of awareness that long-term vaping can lead to conditions such as chronic bronchitis and that it increases the risk of heart disease[30,31].

Young people within our study had varied levels of awareness with regards to strength of nicotine within vapes. Some were well-informed, particularly regular users, while others had limited knowledge and understanding of the different nicotine levels and their effects. Due to a sharing culture among our young people, some were unaware of the level of nicotine the vape contained. Focus group discussions highlighted that most young people do not fully understand that many vape products contain high levels of nicotine, equivalent to that in traditional cigarettes. There is a need to increase education and awareness on levels of nicotine and its potential health risks and risks of nicotine dependency and addiction. Addressing these gaps in awareness may help young people make more informed choices regarding vape use and nicotine intake.

Young people's perceptions varied on how easy it is to quit vaping. Individual experiences differed among those who had tried to quit with some feeling that quitting was easy while others recognised the potential challenges involved, especially when they were regularly being exposed to friends, peers and family members vaping. Research suggests that

although some young people may have the intention to quit, they often underestimate the difficulty of overcoming their dependency on nicotine. Also, peer pressure and the availability of vape products can complicate the quitting process[32,33].

Behaviours

This study shows that one in five young people have tried a vape (20%), with 15% being current vapers. Our results are comparable to the YPBAS 2022 survey in terms of the proportion of young people in Year 8 to Year 12 who were regular users (6%)[5].

Opportunity

An understanding of the opportunities to vape for young people have emerged from this study. Firstly, young people could easily access vapes, and most obtained these from friends and family. For those who purchased their own vapes, there appears to be widespread availability of products both in local retail and online. Although in NI it is illegal to sell vapes and any other nicotine inhaling products to anyone under the age of 18, our study highlighted that many young people can often purchase these products without strict age verification checks at the point of sale. It is important to tackle accessibility of vaping as existing research suggests that e-cigarettes may act as a gateway into regular smoking[34]. This study provides some evidence of this, with 33% of those who had never smoked traditional cigarettes before they had tried a vape having since experimented with cigarettes; of these 16% continue to smoke.

The school environment can also have a significant role in shaping young people's perceptions of vaping[27]. Vaping on school premises, particularly in the bathrooms, is very common and difficult to manage; as a result, young people are being regularly exposed to vaping which can contribute to it being normalised, and young people therefore viewing it as an acceptable behaviour. Evidence shows that the likelihood of young people using vapes increases steadily when pupils observe their use at school[27].

Motivation

A greater understanding of motivations for vaping may help inform preventative strategies to reduce vaping among young people. We found that young people are primarily motivated to vape out of curiosity, with initiation to vaping occurring mainly with friends and peers. Many of our young people viewed vaping as a social norm, this was often influenced by seeing other people vaping, especially among their friends and peers.

These findings point toward possible interventions to reduce uptake of vaping among young people, or to help current vapers to quit. Peer influence plays a key role in uptake of vaping among young people, which suggests that young people should be educated on how to resist peer influence and pressure.

Education

Social media played a significant role in influencing young people's perceptions of vaping. Content can often glamorise the activity by using celebrities and influencers to promote vaping and the fun aspects which can lead to increased usage and often downplay important information about nicotine content and the health consequences associated with vaping. Studies have revealed that misinformation disseminated through social media, lead to misconceptions about the safety and long-term effects of e-cigarettes[35,36]. These misconceptions pose considerable challenges for public health efforts aimed at reducing vaping rates. This highlights the need for targeted educational initiatives that address peer influence and media representation.

Perspectives of teaching staff

Teachers expressed concerns about prevalence of vaping among pupils, identifying it as a normalised behaviour that has increased in popularity due to factors such as peer influence and the marketing tactics employed by vaping companies. Teachers noted that vaping appears to be deemed a less risky behaviour among students compared to smoking traditional cigarettes. Many reported observing a negative impact on students such as lack of engagement, low performance, and disruption to classes. There was an overall view that parents may be unaware of the specific risks associated with vaping or the extent of vaping among young people.

Although youth vaping poses many challenges for teaching staff, schools have taken measures to try and minimise the use of vapes such as education and awareness programmes, peer-led initiatives, and collaborating with local organisations to bring in resources and expertise to inform pupils about the risks and health effects of vaping; having formal policies in place to enforce a no vaping culture. Schools have also made changes to reduce opportunities for vaping such as monitoring of bathrooms and installing vape detectors. These multifaceted approaches aim to create a healthier school environment and support students in making informed choices about their health.

Future activity

Any future activity will need to involve all key stakeholders. Engaging with teaching staff and youth to co-create initiatives and resource materials may provide a relatable and impactful approach to addressing the issue of youth vaping. Such activity may also open up opportunities for teachers to facilitate conversations about risks that resonate with young people. Educating parents about the health consequences associated with vaping may further help reinforce anti-vaping messages being communicated in schools.

Our findings showed that young people considered vaping as an outlet for stress relief. Therefore, an important aspect of vaping prevention and cessation may include programs to guide and support young people, providing them with healthier ways of coping with their anxiety and stress.

While barriers exist in young people's efforts to quit vaping, effectively designed and targeted cessation services that offer a non-judgemental supportive environment may encourage young people to seek help. Young people are heavily influenced by their peers. If quitting vaping is normalised or supported within their social circles, they may be more likely to engage with cessation services. A holistic approach that considers the overall well-being of the young person, such as addressing any underlying issues, for example, anxiety or depression, may make cessation services more appealing to young people.

Strengths and limitations of study

First time in NI such a study has been undertaken to gain insights and experiences from both young people and teaching staff on youth vaping.

The sample of young people was taken from the whole of NI by recruiting participants within the school setting, potentially engaging more young people in the study than if undertaken within the community.

While every effort was made to recruit teachers that represented the demographic of post-primary schools in NI, our sample did not have representation from all Trust areas. However, views from teachers in four of the five trusts were captured.

Young people self-reported on smoking and vaping status which can be subject to social desirability bias as participants may intentionally provide inaccurate information to present themselves in a positive light, leading to underreporting of undesirable behaviours and overreporting of desirable ones. However, participants were ensured that their responses were completely confidential and would be anonymised within the report.

It was more difficult to access older pupils to participate in Focus Groups around exam time due to GCSE and A Level commitments which may have resulted in representation being skewed towards younger pupils.

The sample of teaching staff was not representative of Northern Ireland teachers as a whole due to a small sample size. Furthermore, views were those of the teacher and may not necessarily be representative of all teaching staff within the school as a whole. However, this is the first-time staff views have been captured and could serve as a baseline/reference point for future studies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research provides a useful insight into youth experiences and perspectives on vaping with the secondary education setting, as a first in NI. It also highlights the complexity of youth vaping behaviours; including motivation behind usage, peer influence and marketing tactics. There is a need to act to regulate the marketing and accessibility of vapes, provide evidence based public health messaging and develop co-created initiatives to support young people. These initiatives should encompass stress management, skill-building to resist peer influence, and education on nicotine levels and vaping chemicals and associated risks. Provision of youth-centred cessation services are

warranted as is a holistic approach to behaviour change, targeting core needs. Future longitudinal studies to assess how perceptions and use of vapes evolve over time and implications of long-term use could be useful.

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