BC youth's experiences with vaping and nicotine pouches

Findings from a youth-led study

McCreary
Centre Society

We gratefully acknowledge that the McCreary Centre Society is located on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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Key findings

Findings from 2,784 British Columbia (BC) young people aged 12–19 who took part in a 2025 youth-led survey about vaping, nicotine pouches, and other nicotine products showed that:

* Most youth (69%) had never vaped. The most common reasons these youth gave for not vaping were thinking it would be bad for their health (87%) and not being interested in vaping (85%).

* Youth were more likely to have ever vaped (31%) than to have smoked tobacco (19%) and used nicotine pouches (11%).

* Among youth who had vaped, 66% had done so in the past month, including around a third (32%) who vaped every day.

* Vaping was linked to the use of other nicotine products. Youth who had vaped were more likely than those who had never vaped to have smoked tobacco (63% vs. 2%) and to have used nicotine pouches (36% vs. 2%).

* Among youth who had used nicotine pouches, 40% used them while playing sports or exercising (e.g., 43% of males vs. 25% of females).

* Youth with poorer mental health were more likely to vape recently and regularly. For example, youth who experienced extreme stress in the past month were more likely than those who experienced lower levels of stress to have vaped during that time (72% vs. 61%; among youth who had tried vaping) and to have vaped every day (44% vs. 28%).

* Youth who had vaped most commonly reported vaping the last time because their friends were doing it (40%). However, youth who vaped on 20 or more days in the past month were more likely to report vaping because they were addicted to it (67% vs. 17% who vaped on fewer days); because they felt stressed (44% vs. 34%) and sad (23% vs. 15%); and as a substitute for using cigarettes, nicotine pouches, or other substances (21% vs. 11%).

* Around 6 in 10 youth (62%) had seen advertisements that described the harms associated with vaping through a poster or video from the *A–Z of Vaping* campaign (67% of youth who had vaped vs. 60% of those who had never vaped).

* Three quarters of youth who had vaped (75%) indicated they had stopped or reduced their vaping in the past year. When asked what had helped or what would help them in this area, youth most commonly identified feeling ready or motivated to stop or reduce their vaping (38%), and spending less time around people who vaped (36%).

* Under half of youth felt their school's vaping policies were well communicated to students (47%), and that these policies were effective in preventing vaping (21%). Survey respondents' suggestions for how schools could support students around vaping included integrating more vaping-related education and information into the school curriculum, and offering easily accessible supports for those wanting to stop or reduce their vaping. They also suggested providing interventions that included harm-reduction components, that 'met youth where they were at,' and were delivered in a compassionate and non-judgmental way.

Introduction

Background

In 2020, the BC Ministry of Health commissioned McCreary Centre Society (McCreary) to carry out a study on the vaping experiences of youth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. An advisory committee of BC vaping experts oversaw the project, and 28 youth researchers were recruited and trained from communities across BC to co-develop and deliver three online surveys to their peers. The surveys were delivered at three-month intervals (June, September, and December, 2020) and were each accessible for one month. BC youth (ages 12–19) were invited to complete any of these surveys, including all three surveys. Findings from those surveys were shared in a report: ***mcs.bc.ca/pdf/youth_vaping_covid19.pdf***.

Following the release of the report, some of the youth researchers became founding members of the Minister of Health's Youth Advisory Council on Health and Wellness (BC YAC), supported by McCreary. The group has continued to develop and work on vaping-related projects, including supporting the work of the BC Ministries of Health, and of Education and Child Care in this area.

The purpose of the 2025 survey was to canvass the current experiences of youth when it came to vaping, as well as their experiences with nicotine pouches which have gained popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic. There was also interest from school districts in gauging youth's perspectives on the policies relating to vaping on school grounds (including bathrooms) and youth's suggestions for addressing this issue.

In consultation with experts in the field of vaping and nicotine pouches, members of McCreary's BC YAC reviewed the 2020 vaping surveys, co-developed and piloted questions for the 2025 survey, and shared the survey link among their peers. The survey was available for one month for BC youth ages 12–19 to complete, including youth who had never vaped or used nicotine pouches. Members of the BC YAC then came together for an in-person working meeting where they learned how to analyze the survey data using SPSS statistics. In addition to analyzing the data and selecting key findings, they worked on youth-friendly dissemination materials to share the results.

About the results

All reported comparisons and associations are statistically significant at $p < .05$. This means there is less than a 5% likelihood the results occurred by chance.

Results are presented to the nearest rounded percentage, which may mean they do not always total 100%.

If a finding could have been influenced by age, additional analyses were conducted to ensure it was not age alone that was driving the results. For example, older youth were more likely than younger youth to have ever vaped. Therefore, additional analyses were carried out to ensure that any reported differences between youth who had vaped and those who had never vaped were still present after controlling for age.

Youth survey participants

A total of 2,784 youth in BC took part in the survey. They ranged in age from 12 to 19, and were most commonly 14 to 16 years old (61%). Around half of youth (52%) identified as female, 43% as male, and 5% as non-binary.

Youth from all five of BC's geographical regions were represented, including Vancouver Coastal (42%), Vancouver Island (27%), Fraser (16%), Interior (8%), and Northern BC (6%). Survey participants most commonly identified their family background as European, followed by Indigenous and East Asian. Eight percent indicated a background not among the list of options, and they most commonly specified Canadian.

Family background	
European	48%
Indigenous	16%
East Asian	14%
Latin, South, Central American	8%
Southeast Asian	7%
African	6%
South Asian	6%
Middle Eastern	5%
Australian, Pacific Islander	3%
Another background	8%
Don't know	10%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Among youth who participated in the survey:

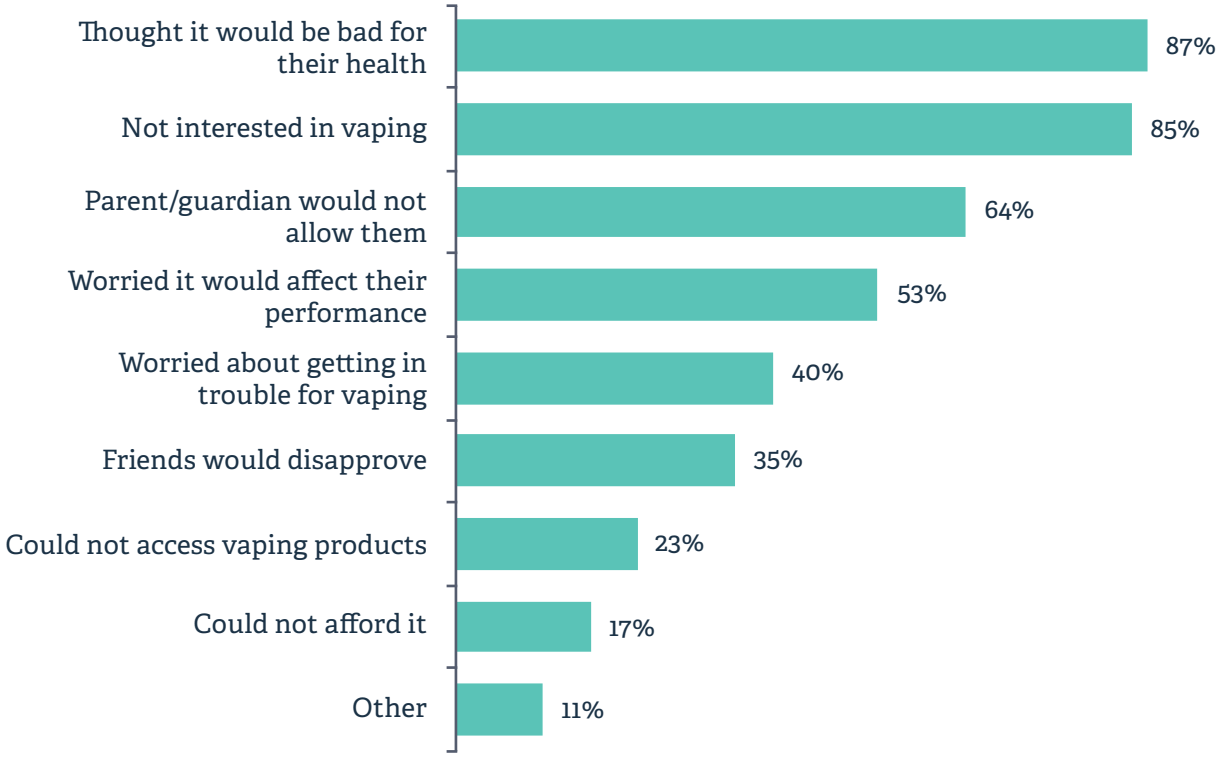
* **31%** had ever vaped.
* **19%** had smoked tobacco (e.g., cigarettes, cigars), including **8%** in the past month, and **2%** on 20 or more days that month.
* **11%** had used nicotine pouches, including **5%** in the past month, and **2%** on 20 or more days that month.
* **A little over 2%** had used a nicotine spray.
* **A little under 2%** had used a nicotine bowl.

Youth who never vaped

"I don't know anybody who vapes."

Most youth (69%) had never vaped. More than 8 in 10 of these youth reported not vaping because they thought it would be bad for their health and they were not interested in vaping. Most also reported they had never vaped because their parent or guardian would not allow them. Eleven percent specified a reason not among the list of options, and common responses included a fear of becoming addicted to vaping (e.g., because of a family history of addiction), seeing the negative effects of vaping among their friends/family who vaped, and religious reasons.

Reasons youth had never vaped *(among those who had never vaped)*



Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Comments from youth who had never vaped on the reasons they had never done so

"Addiction runs in my family."

"I don't want popcorn lungs."

"I don't THINK it would be bad for my health, I KNOW it's bad."

"It's not worth the money of buying a vape or what it does to your body."

"I have a lot of close friends that do engage in vaping ... For even short walks, they're out of breath. Their faces get flushed easier. The only thing they're thinking about while not vaping is vaping, and I've seen friends go to unethical measures for vapes. They're unpleasant to be around sometimes too."

"I think it's just gross."

"My mental health hasn't gotten to the point where I think I need to. Almost there, but not quite."

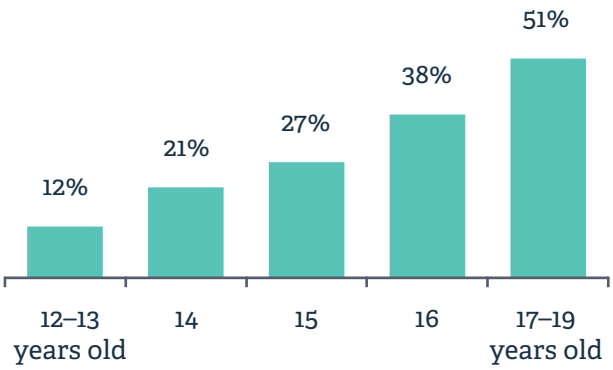
"Not part of my religion."

Youth's experiences with vaping

Results in this section are among youth who had vaped.

Among the 31% of youth who had ever vaped, older youth were more likely than younger ones to have done so. Males were the least likely to have vaped, and non-binary youth were the most likely (39% of non-binary youth vs. 29% of females vs. 22% of males).

Youth who had ever vaped



The majority of youth who had vaped (66%) had done so in the past month, including around a third who vaped every day.

Number of days youth vaped in the past 30 days *(among those who had ever vaped)*	
0 days	34%
1 or 2 days	10%
3 to 5 days	5%
6 to 9 days	4%
10 to 19 days	6%
20 to 29 days	8%
All 30 days	32%

Youth more likely to have vaped recently and regularly

Among youth who had vaped, those aged 16 or older were more likely than younger youth to have vaped in the past month (69% vs. 62%), including on 20 or more days (45% vs. 34%).

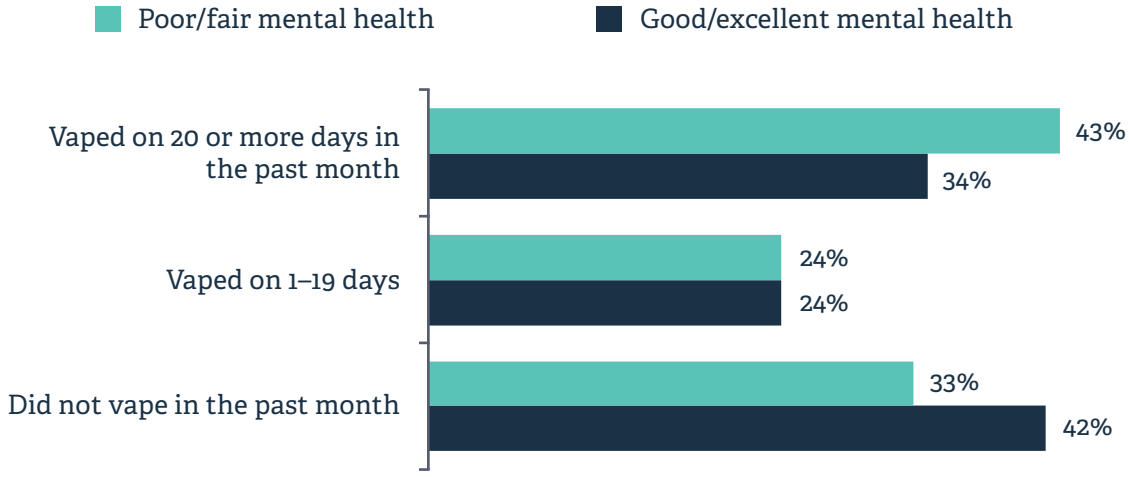
There were no gender differences in vaping in the past month, but males were the least likely to have vaped on 20 or more days (e.g., 31% vs. 42% of females).

Among youth who had tried vaping, those who experienced extreme stress in the past month were more likely than those who experienced lower levels of stress to have vaped during that time (72% vs. 61%). They were also more likely to have vaped every day (44% vs. 28%).

> *"I was introduced to smoking, vaping, drinking, etc., when I was 12 years old by friends much older than me, and it became a bad habit for a long time."*

Similarly, youth who rated their mental health as poor or fair were more likely than those who rated it as good or excellent to have vaped in the past month (67% vs. 58%), and to have done so on most days.

Youth who rated their mental health less positively were more likely to vape recently and regularly ***(among those who had ever vaped)***



Vaping and physical activity

As noted earlier, the majority of youth who had ever vaped had vaped in the past month. This was also the case for youth who regularly took part in sports and other types of physical activity. For example, 56% of youth who played organized sports (i.e., with a coach or instructor) at least weekly in the past month had vaped during that time. However, this percentage was lower than the 68% among youth who played organized sports less often or not at all.

Vaping in the past month was also common among youth who took part at least weekly in extreme sports (65%; among those who had ever vaped); dance/yoga/exercise classes (63%); informal sports (e.g., such as biking, hiking; 62%); exercised at a gym or rec centre (62%); and exercised to an online video (58%).

Reported reasons for vaping

> *"I was at a depressive point in my life when I was vaping. I've quit but it's been months and I cannot find professional help. Giving youth access to professional help that is confidential would help a lot."*

Youth who had vaped were asked why they had vaped the last time. They most commonly reported vaping because their friends were doing it.

Reasons youth vaped the last time *(among those who had ever vaped)*	
Friends were doing it	40%
The taste/flavours	34%
Addicted to vaping/feel hooked	34%
Felt stressed or anxious	32%
Felt like there was nothing else to do/was bored	28%
Wanted to try it	28%
Wanted to have fun	23%
The visual appeal of the vapor (e.g., I wanted to do vape tricks)	18%
Felt down/sad	17%
Vaped instead of using cigarettes, nicotine pouches, or other substances	13%
A family member was doing it	8%
Pressured into doing it/to fit in	8%
Other	9%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Nine percent of youth reported reasons for vaping that were not among the list of options. These included the head rush they experienced from vaping, feeling that vaping was normalized among their peers, and because it had become a habit (e.g., something to do with their hands).

Younger youth were more likely than older ones to have vaped the last time because their friends were doing it (e.g., 77% of 12-year-olds vs. 48% of 14-year-olds vs. 34% of 18-year-olds) and because they felt pressured into doing it/to fit in (14% of those aged 12–14 vs. 7% of those aged 15–19). Older youth were more likely than younger ones to have vaped the last time because they felt addicted to vaping (36% of those aged 15–19 vs. 25% of younger youth) and because they vaped instead of using cigarettes, nicotine pouches, or other substances (14% vs. 8%).

Comments from youth on their reasons for vaping the last time *(among those who had vaped)*

"The nice good head rush."

"I like the domer [intense head rush]."

"It was just new when I got to high school and it felt normal."

"Was at a party with people vaping."

"It helps me focus."

"Vaping is good for my mental health."

"When I am stressed, vapes and cigarettes are the things which make me feel relaxed and reduce the stresses."

"The hand to mouth (satisfies need to bring something to my mouth and inhale? If that makes sense)."

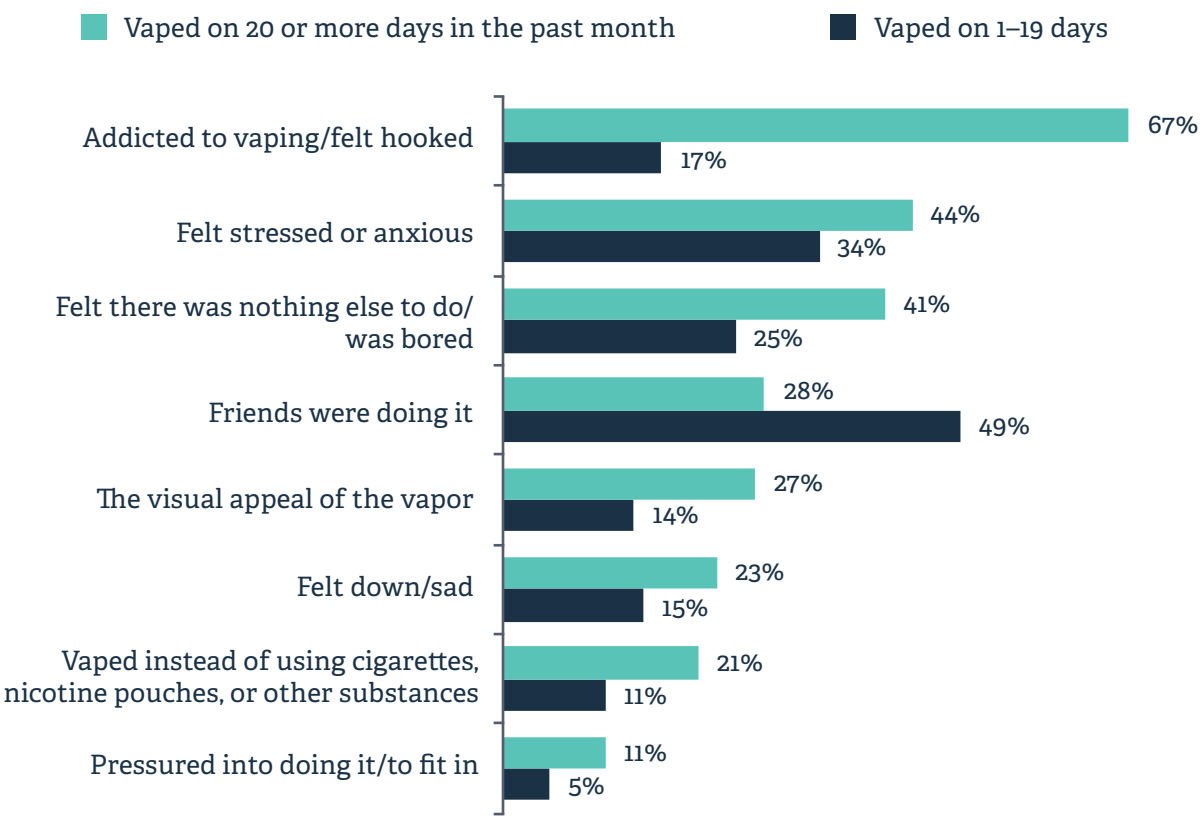
"Habit/routine."

"To look cool."

There were some gender differences in reported reasons for having vaped. For example, non-binary youth were the most likely to report vaping because they were pressured into doing it/to fit in (e.g., 16% vs. 5% of females); that they vaped instead of using cigarettes, nicotine pouches, or other substances (e.g., 24% vs. 9% of males); and because they felt down or sad (e.g., 31% vs. 13% of males). Males were the least likely to report vaping because they were addicted to it (e.g., 23% vs. 51% of non-binary youth) and because they felt stressed or anxious (e.g., 25% vs. 36% of females).

There were also differences in reported reasons for vaping the last time based on how often youth vaped in the past month. For example, those who vaped on 20 or more days were more likely than those who vaped on fewer days that month to report vaping because they were addicted to it; for emotional reasons (e.g., they felt stressed or sad); and as a substitute for using cigarettes, nicotine pouches, or other substances.

Reasons youth vaped the last time
(among those who vaped in the past month)



Where youth got their vape supplies

> *"Reduce the number of weed/vape businesses. Open up arcades, karaoke bars, a toy store. Something fun for everyone."*

Youth most commonly got their vape supplies from another youth, and around a third got them from an adult. Fourteen percent got their supplies from a source not among the list of options, and these youth most commonly specified that they did not have their own vape supplies and instead used the supplies of others.

Where youth got their vape supplies *(among those who had ever vaped)*	
From another youth	55%
From an adult	34%
Bought at a store	23%
Bought online	11%
Another source	14%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Note: 'Another source' included youth who wrote on the survey that they found their vape supplies or got them from a local 'supplier.'

In BC, the legal age for buying vapes from a store and online is 19. Those aged 19 were more likely than younger youth to buy their vape supplies at a store (e.g., 73% of 19-year-olds vs. 28% of 18-year-olds). However, they were no more likely to buy their supplies online than younger youth. Youth were also asked about buying vape supplies from individuals, and 19-year-olds were less likely than those 18 or younger to have bought them from a youth (19% vs. 56%) and from an adult (15% vs. 35%).

In addition to these age differences, there were also differences in where youth got their vape supplies based on how frequently they vaped in the past month. Those who vaped on 20 or more days were more likely to have bought their supplies online (20% vs. 7% who vaped on 1–19 days in the past month), at a store (38% vs. 14%), and from an adult (49% vs. 27%). In contrast, those who vaped on fewer days were more likely to report getting their supplies from another youth (56% vs. 46% of those who vaped on 20 or more days).

Stopping or reducing vaping

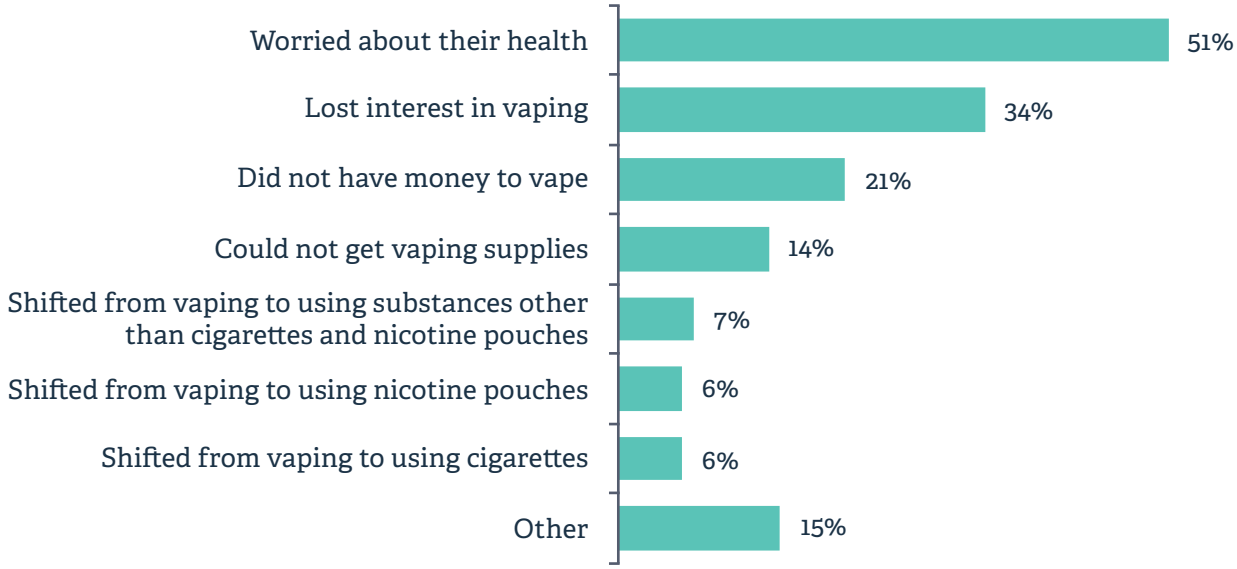
> *"I would like to quit vaping. I am happy to have stopped smoking cigarettes, which I do feel was worse, but vaping addiction costs me a lot of money (I am buying a disposable vape for about $50 every 7–10 days)."*

Three quarters of youth who had vaped (75%) indicated they had stopped or reduced their vaping in the past year. Among these youth, their most common reason for doing so was concern about their health, followed by a loss of interest in vaping.

There were no age differences in reported reasons for having stopped or reduced their vaping, except those aged 18–19 were more likely to indicate they had shifted from vaping to using cigarettes (15% vs. 5% of younger youth).

Fifteen percent of youth indicated reasons for stopping or reducing their vaping that were not among the list of options. These included their peers or partner wanting them to stop; their parents finding out about their vaping; vaping adding to their anxiety rather than decreasing it; and because vaping was negatively affecting their involvement in physical activities.

Youth's reasons for having stopped/reduced their vaping in the past year
(among those who stopped/reduced their vaping)



Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Comments about why youth had stopped or reduced their vaping in the past year
(among those who had stopped/reduced their vaping)

"I didn't care enough about it to keep doing it and I never owned one."

"I didn't want to spend money."

"I found other ways to help me deal with anxiety."

"I got caught at school and got in trouble and my parents were mad at me."

"I used to vape occasionally and then I realized that I didn't benefit at all from it and it felt really lame to do, so I just stopped (I was never addicted so it was not hard but I recognize it is a lot harder for others)."

"I play sports and it was affecting my ability to run."

"It added to my stress and anxiety, plus my job at a summer camp would not have allowed it so I thought it was better to quit sooner."

"My boyfriend wanted me to quit."

Success with stopping or reducing vaping

"I'm very happy to have my friends to help me through my addiction and help me quit. I wouldn't be where I am without them."

Most youth (70%) who had wanted to stop or reduce their vaping in the past year reported they had been successful in doing so.

When youth were asked what had helped or what would help them to stop or reduce their vaping, they most commonly identified feeling ready or motivated to do so, and spending less time around people who vaped. For 12% of youth, needing to be motivated was the only thing they indicated would help them to reduce or stop vaping, and 23% exclusively did not know what would help.

What would help or what had helped youth to stop or reduce their vaping *(among those who felt they had needed or wanted help in this area)*

Feeling ready or motivated to stop or reduce their vaping	38%
Spending less time around people who vape	36%
Access to nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products	14%
Mental health counselling	11%
Getting more support outside their school to stop or quit vaping	10%
Getting more support at their school to stop or quit vaping	4%
Online resources (e.g., QuitNow, HealthLinkBC)	2%
Other	14%
Don't know	34%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Sixteen percent of youth who had ever vaped indicated they did not need or want help to stop or reduce their vaping.

Fourteen percent of youth identified other supports that had helped or would help them to stop or reduce their vaping. Examples included distracting themselves by taking part in physical activities and hobbies, and socializing with friends who did not vape.

Youth's comments on what had helped or what would help them to stop or reduce their vaping *(among those who felt they had needed or wanted help in this area)*

"You can't quit vaping from other people telling you. You have to really want to quit yourself, otherwise it's impossible and you shouldn't even try."

"Distract myself with hobbies and hanging out with friends."

"Running has really helped me and kept me busy."

"I went on vacation and couldn't get a vape and when I came back I didn't start again."

"If I run out of money for it."

"My friends were really helpful and motivating."

"My mom's concern about me."

"Wellness center."

Getting information about vaping

Results in this section are among all youth who completed the survey.

Accessing reliable information

When asked where they went for reliable information on vaping, around a quarter of youth reported going to a family member, and around 1 in 5 went to a friend or another youth.

Around 1 in 10 youth accessed social media for such information, and when asked to specify they commonly listed TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, and Snapchat. Some youth added comments that they saw content on social media, including from doctors, which highlighted the negative impacts of vaping on health (e.g., popcorn lung), the ingredients in vapes, and positive or motivational content about quitting.

Three percent of youth indicated other sources they went to for reliable information on vaping. These included ChatGPT, Google/Internet, research papers, and school assemblies.

There were some age differences in where youth accessed reliable information on vaping. For example, those aged 16 or older were more likely than younger youth to get this information from a government website (21% vs. 16% of those aged 12–15) and social media (12% vs. 8%), and were less likely to go to a family member for this information (21% vs. 30%).

Where youth went for reliable information on vaping	
A family member	26%
A friend or other youth	21%
Government website (e.g., QuitNow, HealthLinkBC)	18%
School staff	17%
A doctor or nurse outside their school and family	17%
Other health professional	15%
Social media	9%
Another source	3%
Didn't know where to go for reliable information on vaping	6%
Didn't go anywhere for this information	39%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

There were also some gender differences, with non-binary youth the least likely to go to a family member for reliable information on vaping (e.g., 15% vs. 28% of males) and to a doctor or nurse outside their school and family (9% vs. 16% of females vs. 20% of males). Males were the most likely to access this information from a government website (e.g., 21% vs. 17% of females) and were more likely than females to go to school staff for this information (20% vs. 15%). Females were more likely than males to report not going anywhere for reliable information on vaping (41% vs. 37%).

Youth who had vaped were more likely than those who had never vaped to seek reliable information on vaping from a friend or other youth (27% vs. 19%) and social media (12% vs. 8%). Youth who had never vaped were more likely to access this information from a family member (30% vs. 18% of those who had vaped), government website (20% vs. 15%), school staff (20% vs. 11%), a doctor or nurse outside their school and family (19% vs. 13%), and other health professionals (17% vs. 9%).

Advertisements for vaping products

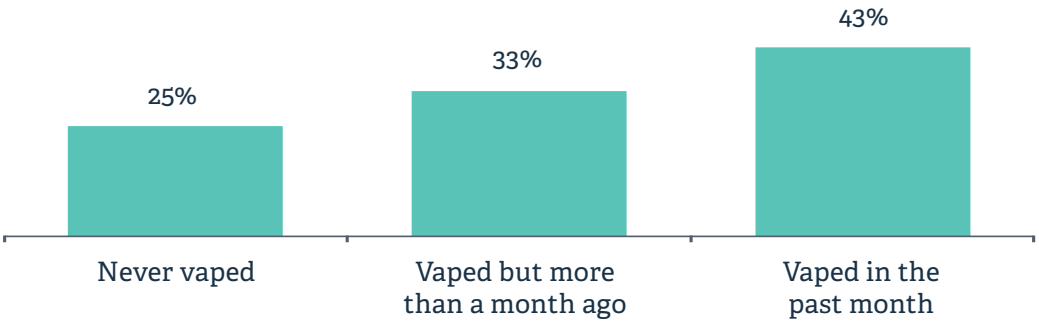
> *"On TikTok there was this girl saying vaping was good for you."*

Around 3 in 10 youth (29%) had seen advertisements that promoted or sold vaping products on social media. These youth commonly specified seeing such advertisements on TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. Others had seen such ads on YouTube, Facebook, and X (previously Twitter).

Nineteen percent of youth had seen advertisements that promoted or sold vaping products somewhere other than social media. These youth had most commonly seen the ads in storefronts where vaping products were sold. They also saw such ads at gas stations, other stores, and on billboards and posters around town (e.g., on bus shelters, benches, and lampposts), and in TV commercials. Also, 29% of youth reported they did not know or did not remember where they had seen such ads.

Youth who had vaped in the past month were the most likely to have seen ads that promoted or sold vaping products on social media, as were older compared to younger youth (32% of those aged 15–19 vs. 24% of those aged 12–14). Youth who had never vaped were the most likely to have seen such ads somewhere other than social media (21% vs. 15% of youth who had vaped).

Youth who had seen advertisements that promoted or sold vaping products on social media



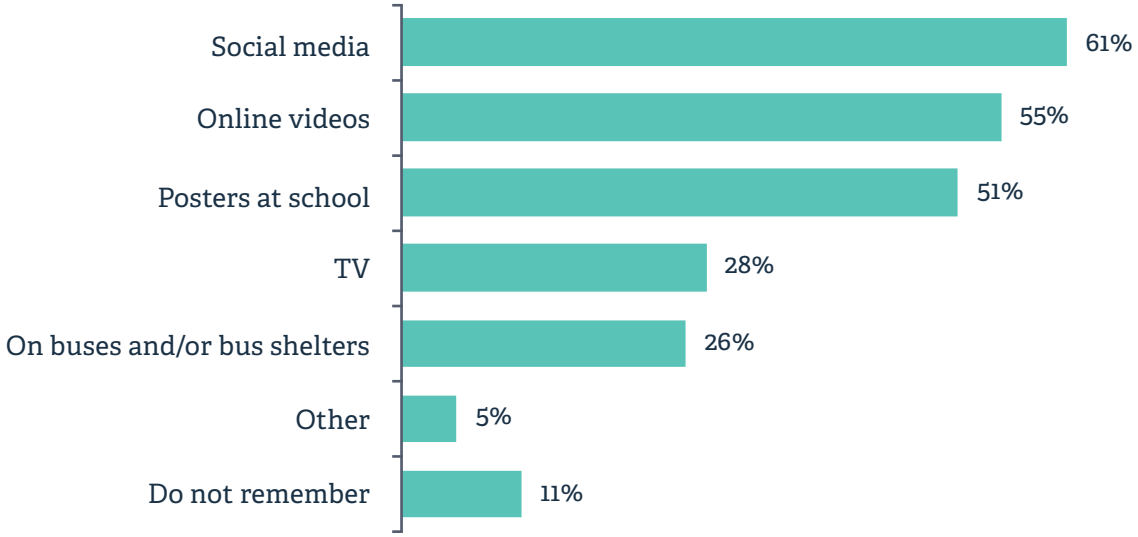
Advertisements describing the harms of vaping

Around 6 in 10 youth (62%) had seen advertisements that described the harms associated with vaping through a poster or video from the *A–Z of Vaping Campaign* (67% of youth who had vaped vs. 60% of those who had never vaped). Also, 40% had seen advertisements other than the *A–Z of Vaping Campaign* that described the harms associated with vaping.

Ten percent of youth did not know or did not remember if they had seen advertisements about vaping harms (11% of those who had never vaped vs. 8% who had vaped), and 13% had not seen these ads.

Youth were also asked where they had seen such advertisements, and they most commonly reported social media, followed by online videos and posters at school.

Where youth remembered seeing advertisements that described the harms associated with vaping



Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Vaping and relationships

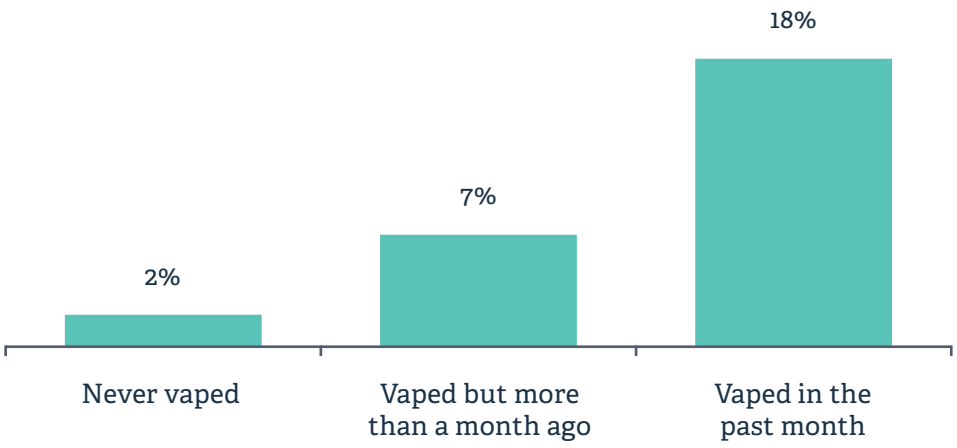
"I got closer with some friends because I encouraged them to stop vaping, and they were happier after quitting and we built a stronger friendship."

Around three quarters of youth reported that their own or others' vaping had not affected their relationships in the past year. However, 20% reported that it had negatively affected their relationships, and 5% reported it had positively affected their relationships. One percent indicated that their own or others' vaping had both negatively and positively affected their relationships.

Youth who had vaped were more likely than those who had never vaped to report that vaping had negatively affected their relationships (26% vs. 18%), and that it had positively impacted their relationships (14% vs. 2%). Those who vaped in the past month were the most likely to report a positive impact on their relationships.

When asked to explain, youth who had never vaped commonly stated that vaping had not impacted their relationships because they did not have friends or family who vaped. Other youth who had never vaped explained that their relationships had been negatively impacted by vaping because they had stopped being friends with people who started vaping (e.g., because they disapproved of their friends' vaping).

Youth who vaped recently were the most likely to report that vaping had positively affected their relationships



Youth who had vaped commonly described that vaping had negatively impacted their relationships because it had put a strain on their friendships. For example, it caused conflict when they vaped and their friends disapproved of their vaping; or when they stopped vaping and their friends who vaped no longer wanted to spend time with them.

Some youth also described that vaping had positively impacted their relationships because it provided them with a sense of community and allowed them to bond with others.

Those who reported both positive and negative impacts on their relationships due to vaping explained that some relationships suffered when they started vaping (e.g., with parents or friends who disapproved of their vaping) but they were able to make new friends or feel closer to their friends who vaped. Some of these youth added that they and their friends subsequently supported one another to stop vaping, which helped to strengthen their relationship.

Comments on how vaping (by themselves and/or by others) had affected their relationships

"I found out my friends were vaping and it caused conflict."

"I haven't vaped in a very long time and my relationships would not be affected whether I chose to or chose not to."

"As soon as I quit vaping, some friends I thought were close friends quit talking to me as much as we used to."

"Me and my mom's relationship went downhill but me and my brother bonded about it then reduced our use of vaping together."

"Smoking/vaping is the reason I met most of my friends. It brings people together sort of like a shared hobby."

"Gives me opportunity to fit in with a larger community."

"Got broken up with cuz of it and also made lots of friends cuz of it."

"It helped me feel closer to my friends, but distant and embarrassing when I told my parents."

"I started vaping to be friends with a group of people and it worked. I got addicted though but was able to stop."

Vaping and school

"I feel like it would be very good for teachers to keep more of an eye out on people who deal vapes at school."

"Every staff member is trying their hardest to prevent vaping in schools and I appreciate their effort."

Youth were asked about the vaping policies and practices at their school. Under half felt their school's vaping policies were well communicated to students. Also, a minority reported that the vaping policies were effective in preventing vaping, and that these policies were balanced with providing students with support and education around vaping.

How much youth agreed about vaping policies and practices at their school

	Disagreed/ Strongly disagreed	Agreed/ Strongly agreed	Did not know
Vaping policies at my school are effective in preventing vaping	66%	21%	13%
Vaping policies at my school are well communicated to students	40%	47%	12%
Vaping policies at my school are balanced with support and education for students	40%	36%	24%
Dealing with students who vape takes staff's time away from teaching	34%	42%	24%

Vaping in school bathrooms

"I feel really uncomfortable and unsafe going to the bathroom with other students vaping. At some points, I just skip going to the bathroom and just hold it in."

Youth were asked an open-ended question about what schools could do to address vaping in the bathrooms. In general, students felt that schools needed to have clearer policies around vaping and to enforce them consistently. Many also described that a focus should be on learning about the health risks associated with vaping.

"Establishing a well-defined anti-vaping policy is crucial. This policy should outline prohibited behaviours, consequences for violations, and available support resources. Consistent enforcement ensures that students understand the seriousness of the issue and the school's commitment to maintaining a healthy environment."

"Be more direct about the rules and don't turn a blind eye to it like they usually do."

"Clear rules—Have fair, consistent policies focused on health, not just discipline."

"Have posters about rules around vaping and posters for the dangers of vaping."

"Having consistent ways of educating students before they decide to vape in the first place would be optimal (such as school assemblies, mandatory educational videos, and general support to understand the serious damage that it can cause)."

Some students—mainly those who did not vape—listed specific consequences they felt could be enforced if students were caught vaping in the bathrooms. These included confiscating students' vapes and informing their parents or guardians. Others suggested there should be closer monitoring of vaping in the bathrooms.

"Bathroom sign in sign out system so that if a vape is found or it smells like vape, the people can be caught."

"Add a 'report vaping' number in the bathroom to anonymously report students vaping at school."

Another suggestion, including from students who vaped, as well as those who did not, was for schools to have a separate area where youth could go to vape or smoke so that they were not doing so in the washrooms.

"Add a smoke spot off school grounds like they had in the 80s."

"Better it be allowed outside the school building so if help is needed students can ask/they will be in a visible place if they need immediate assistance."

"Allow designated spots outside. Being addicted to nicotine myself (primarily through vaping), I know that most people who are hooked will use, whether it is allowed or not."

"I strongly believe if students were given a non-punishable area to vape off property the issue with students vaping in the washrooms would be non-existent. It doesn't completely eliminate the issue of vaping but makes the school feel safer to students and reduce staff interactions with the issue."

Some students commented that if youth were caught vaping, school staff should have conversations with them, try to understand the reasons they vaped, and offer them support and resources. A related idea was to post QR codes in bathroom stalls. The QR codes could link to resources relating to stopping or reducing vaping, and other supports that students could discreetly access.

"Maybe instead of suspending them, staff could try and have a genuine conversation with students and ask why they are vaping, if they need support quitting, etc.

"Maybe offer up anonymous support for addicted students, and make it known that there is support."

Suggestions on how schools could support students to stop or reduce their vaping

Youth offered a range of suggestions in response to an open-ended question about how schools could best support students to stop or reduce their vaping. A number of youth (mostly those who did not vape) identified punitive strategies, such as confiscating students' vapes, monitoring washrooms, checking bags, and sending youth home or suspending them for vaping at school.

Many youth expressed that it would be helpful to have vaping-related education and information (e.g., on the potential health risks) more widely available, and shared in a way that student could relate to. Students felt that this education should be integrated into the school curriculum through discussions, projects, and creative youth engagement initiatives (e.g., social media campaigns, short films).

> ***"More exposure to the health risks [information] may encourage individuals to re-evaluate their decisions and/or reflect on the potential consequences of their actions. I think schools can implement these educational pieces within classes or educational resources to raise awareness."***

> ***"Pamphlets and posters aren't that helpful. Maybe teachers can be taught more about vaping and share their thoughts on it with their students."***

> ***"Understand the students. Instead of teaching how vaping is harmful … relate to their highs, why they may have started (peer pressure, need for escape, etcetera), and then tell them, while vaping may make you feel this (something positive), it will cause that (something negative), not just for themselves, but also for the people around them."***

> ***"Integrating vaping education into science, health, or even English classes. Preferably not lectures but projects, having students research and present real case studies on vaping related health issues."***

> ***"Letting students create and lead anti-vaping social media campaigns, short-films, or school-wide vape-free challenges (if they see peers create this content it's more likely to create an impact)."***

Students also felt that vaping education could be more effective if young people who had previously vaped were invited to share their personal stories about the harms they had experienced as a result of vaping.

> ***"I think if we were to meet someone who was negatively impacted by vapes and can share their experience with us, it would leave a stronger impact and have more of a chance to reduce vaping by learning from someone who also vaped before (a guest speaker)."***

> ***"Use real stories, not just stats. Bring in former teen vapers or people affected by vaping-related illnesses. Make it relatable and emotional, not just textbook facts."***

> ***"For some students it might help to have people, especially peers, who have experienced negative effects from vaping and speak about their experiences."***

> ***"Maybe instead of having adults teach it, have students/younger people who are experts or have personally experienced the negatives of it to give knowledge, so that the students are more receptive to the idea [to stop or reduce their vaping]."***

Youth commented that young people who were trying to stop or reduce their vaping should have access to supports and resources to do so. They stated that adults should recognize that vaping is often a coping mechanism to deal with mental health or other challenges, including school-related stressors. They suggested that youth should have access to supports (e.g., counselling) to address the underlying issues and to offer alternatives to vaping (e.g., mindfulness practices, lunch time activities, or substitutes to manage cravings). Some noted that having safe spaces in their school or community—where youth could talk about their vaping, create goals, and keep each other accountable—could also be effective in supporting those wanting to stop or reduce their vaping.

"Often, vaping is a reaction to a bad home situation or a lack of support, so kids should have help addressing these underlying issues."

"If they're using vapes to cope with something they're going through […] help them find other ways to cope."

"Have actual resources, not just telling students the risk of vaping. The problem is that with most people who vape it's a crucial coping skill so telling them they'll die isn't helpful."

"If schools really want to help us smoke less or quit e-cigarettes, merely catching them is not enough. Many of us actually start smoking because we are under great pressure, anxious or just want to fit in … If teachers and staff could make us feel that they are 'helping' us rather than 'controlling' us, then we might really be willing to try to quit."

"[Teachers who] will pull you to have a talk, ask if you are under a lot of pressure, if you have any thoughts of quitting, and also provide resources, websites and such. It feels like if the school wants to help you rather than catch you, then perhaps we would be more likely to speak the truth."

"School counsellors or nurses can be trained to help students create a personalized quit plan."

"Schools can offer other methods of dealing with stress or peer-pressure, such as mindful breathing or other techniques."

Youth emphasized that interventions should come from a place of empathy, compassion, and non-judgement, instead of shaming or lecturing youth about their vaping. Some youth felt that incorporating harm-reduction principles into vaping support would be effective, including meeting youth where they were at in terms of their readiness to stop vaping. Some added that having low barrier supports that young people could access discreetly or anonymously was important, especially for those not ready to openly discuss their vaping.

"Help support people trying to quit. Don't make people who are addicted feel bad about it."

"Don't punish students for being honest about their vaping habits. Try to communicate with them instead and point them in the right direction. Maybe advise students about the Foundry or other resources they could use to help themselves not be affected or defined by their vaping habits."

"There needs to be genuine support, not shaming or blaming the students for using vapes, as much as helping them to understand the harmful nature of vaping, and providing support to stop vaping."

"Meet them where they are at. Many students are not mentally prepared to quit, and school staff nagging them is not going to change anything, just cause them to be ashamed and secretive."

"Posters and being monitored only cause shame. These kids are dealing with stressful things and quitting vaping is another stressful thing to add to the table. Schools should take the harm reduction approach and meet students where they are at … Create a space where students can vape/smoke and reduce the stigma and shame around it."

"More support in anonymous ways. I find people don't always use the resources (myself included) because I didn't want adults to know that I vaped, but if I was able to anonymously receive support from staff until I was ready to be less anonymous, I think it would've really helped me."

Nicotine pouches

Eleven percent of youth had used nicotine pouches. Females were the least likely to have used them (8% vs. 13% of males vs. 20% of non-binary youth).

Among youth who had used nicotine pouches, 43% used them in the past month, including 15% who used them every day. Non-binary youth were more likely than males and females to have used nicotine pouches in the past month (e.g., 71% vs. 43% of males; among those who had ever used them).

Number of days youth used nicotine pouches in the past 30 days *(among those who had ever used them)*	
0 days	57%
1 or 2 days	8%
3 to 5 days	8%
6 to 9 days	4%
10 to 19 days	5%
20 to 29 days	2%
All 30 days	15%

Experiences of youth who used nicotine pouches

Findings in this section are among youth who had used nicotine pouches.

Where youth got their nicotine pouches

Youth who had used nicotine pouches reported getting them from another youth (46%), an adult (32%), buying them at a store (27%), and buying them online (14%; they could mark all that applied).

Using nicotine pouches while exercising

Among youth who had used nicotine pouches, 40% had used them while playing sports or exercising. Females were the least likely to have done so (e.g., 25% vs. 43% of males).

Youth who participated in extreme sports at least weekly in the past month were more likely than those who took part less often to have used nicotine pouches while playing sports or exercising (67% vs. 36%). Weekly participation in other types of sports or physical activities was not associated with using nicotine pouches while exercising.

Negative consequences of using nicotine pouches

The majority of youth (69%) had experienced at least one negative consequence from using nicotine pouches. They most commonly reported nausea/vomiting and dizziness.

Negative consequences youth experienced from using nicotine pouches *(among those who had ever used nicotine pouches)*	
Nausea/vomiting	42%
Dizziness	39%
Sweating a lot	28%
Sore mouth/gums	22%
Hiccups	16%
Other	7%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Information about nicotine pouches

Findings in this section are among all youth who took part in the survey.

Accessing reliable information

More than 1 in 10 youth reported accessing reliable information about nicotine pouches from a family member; friend or other youth; and a doctor or nurse (outside their school or family). Youth also went to health professionals and government websites for this information. However, the majority did not go anywhere for this information.

The small minority of youth who accessed social media for reliable information on nicotine pouches commonly specified doing so through Instagram and TikTok. Youth who went to other sources for this information most frequently did a search on the Internet (e.g., Google).

Where youth went for reliable information on nicotine pouches	
A family member	15%
A friend or other youth	13%
A doctor or nurse (outside their school and family)	11%
Other health professional	10%
Government website (e.g., QuitNow, HealthLinkBC)	10%
School staff	9%
Social media	3%
Other	2%
Didn't know where to go for this information	8%
Didn't go anywhere	57%

Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Males were generally the most likely to access various sources for reliable information on nicotine pouches, such as a government website (13% vs. 9% of females) and social media (4% vs. 2% of females). Also, 63% of females and the same percentage of non-binary youth did not go anywhere for this information, compared to 50% of males.

Older youth were more likely than younger ones to access social media for this information (4% of those aged 15–19 vs. 2% of those aged 12–14), while younger youth were more likely to access reliable information on nicotine pouches through their family (20% of those aged 12–14 vs. 12% of those aged 15–19), school staff (11% vs. 8%), and a doctor or nurse outside their school and family (13% vs. 9%).

Youth who had used nicotine pouches were more likely to seek out reliable information on nicotine pouches from a friend or other youth (29% vs. 11% of those who had never used nicotine pouches) and social media (7% vs. 3%). Youth who had never used nicotine pouches were the most likely to not go anywhere for this information (59% vs. 47% who used them but more than a month ago vs. 31% who used them in the past month).

Advertisements for nicotine pouches

The majority of youth (62%) had not seen advertisements that promoted or sold nicotine pouches. However, 17% had seen such advertisements on social media (e.g., they specified seeing them on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter). Also, 6% had seen such advertisements somewhere else, including at convenience stores, gas stations, and on television. Around 1 in 5 (19%) did not know or did not remember if they had seen nicotine pouch advertisements.

Youth who had used nicotine pouches were more likely to have seen advertisements for nicotine pouches (63% vs. 35% of those who had never used nicotine pouches).

Youth's comments on where they had seen advertisements for nicotine pouches

"Dealers that sell them to underage kids on Snapchat."

"I saw a video of a person talking about how good they are."

"It's romanticized by a lot of influencers."

"Lots of hockey players use Zyn, and I've seen people on TikTok use them and promote them."

"Many content creators are sponsored to market them as safe alternatives, and I have also seen them advertised on delivery services."

"Postings on Facebook Marketplace. The images [of nicotine pouches] are blurred but recognizable and sold in large quantities."

Connections between vaping and other nicotine products

Perceived harms of vaping, nicotine pouches, and smoking tobacco

Youth were asked which they felt was the most harmful among vaping, smoking cigarettes, and using nicotine pouches. They most commonly felt that smoking cigarettes was the most harmful (41%), followed by vaping (31%) and then using nicotine pouches (5%). Around a quarter of youth (23%) reported not knowing which was the most harmful.

Use of the three products

Youth were more likely to have ever vaped than to have smoked tobacco and used nicotine pouches. They were also more likely to have vaped recently than to have recently used the other two products (among those who had used them).

Youth who had vaped, smoked tobacco, and used nicotine pouches

		Among youth who had ever used the substance	
	Ever	Past month	Daily in the past month
Vaped	31%	66%	32%
Smoked tobacco	19%	44%	10%
Used nicotine pouches	11%	43%	15%

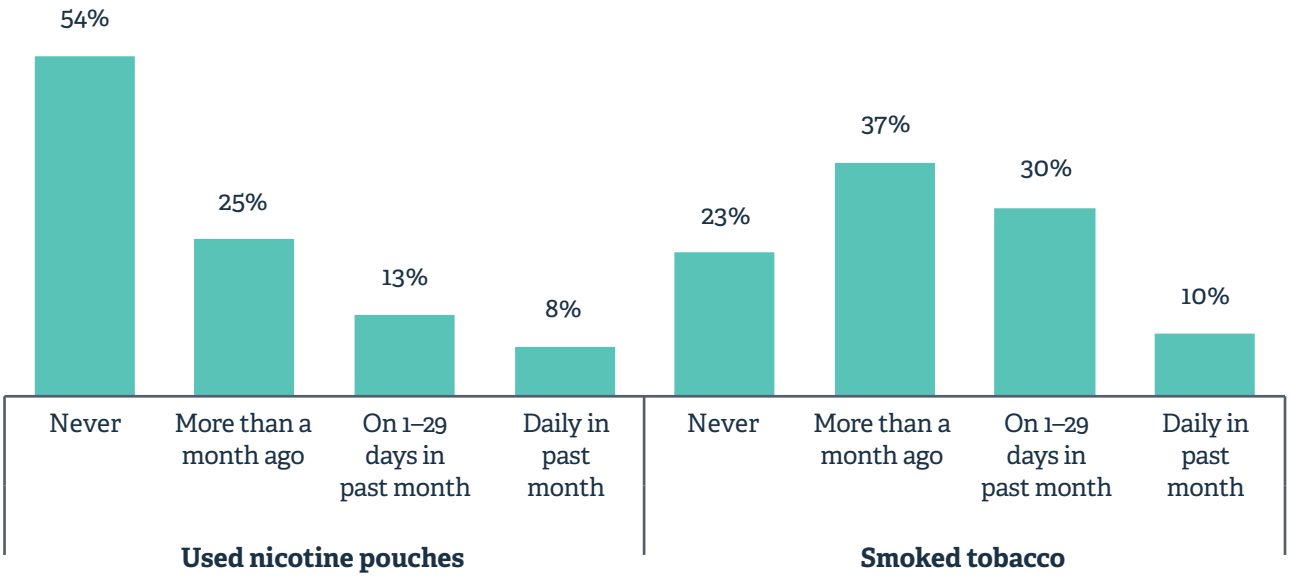
Note: "Past month" includes "daily" use.

Youth who had vaped were more likely than those who had never vaped to have smoked tobacco (63% vs. 2%) and to have used nicotine pouches (36% vs. 2%). Around a third of youth who had ever vaped (31%) had also smoked tobacco and used nicotine pouches (i.e., used all three products).

Recent vaping was associated with the recent use of the other two products. Youth who vaped in the past month were more likely than those who had last vaped more than a month ago to have used nicotine pouches (21% vs. 4%) and to have smoked tobacco (40% vs. 8%) in the past 30 days.

Youth who vaped daily in the past month were also more likely to use nicotine pouches every day (14% vs. 2% of youth who vaped on fewer days) and to smoke tobacco daily (17% vs. 2%).

Rates of using nicotine pouches and smoking tobacco
(among youth who vaped in the past month)



Nicotine bowls and sprays

As stated earlier in this report, just over 2% of youth had ever used a nicotine spray, and just under 2% had used a nicotine bowl. One percent of youth had used both products.

Youth who used nicotine pouches, smoked tobacco, and/or vaped were more likely than those who had never used these substances to have also used nicotine sprays and bowls. For example, youth who used nicotine pouches were 17 times as likely as those who had never used them to have used a nicotine spray.

Also, youth who used nicotine pouches were more likely than those who had smoked tobacco or vaped to have ever used a nicotine bowl or spray. For example, they were over twice as likely as youth who had vaped to have used a nicotine bowl (15% vs. 6%) and spray (17% vs. 8%).

Youth who used nicotine pouches, smoked tobacco, and vaped were more likely to have used a nicotine spray and bowl

	Used nicotine pouches		Smoked tobacco		Vaped	
	Ever	Never	Ever	Never	Ever	Never
Used a nicotine spray	17%	1%	11%	<1%	8%	<1%
Used a nicotine bowl	15%	<1%	9%	NR	6%	NR

NR=Not releasable due to small numbers.

Youth's recommendations

Members of the BC YAC who worked as researchers on this project offered recommendations on how youth who wanted to stop or reduce their vaping/ use of nicotine pouches could be better supported.

The youth researchers highlighted the importance of **understanding why youth might be vaping/ using nicotine pouches**, because doing so could help youth with reducing or stopping their use of these products. For example, if youth are vaping because they feel anxious or stressed, then supportive adults could offer stress-management tools as alternatives to vaping. Understanding the reasons youth might use different substances, such as vapes and nicotine pouches, could also help youth who do not use these products to be more compassionate toward their peers who use them.

Education coupled with support. Learning about the negative consequences of vaping and nicotine pouches is important. However, it might not be enough to help youth to stop or reduce their use of these products. It is also important to offer support and solutions relating to how youth could stop or reduce their use if they feel ready to do so. For example, *The A–Z of vaping* campaign, which was successful in sharing information about the harms of vaping, could perhaps be extended to include supports and solutions for youth who want to quit or reduce their vaping.

A support group specific to vaping and/or nicotine pouches, as opposed to a group for youth who use any type of substance, could be beneficial. Youth who previously used vapes/nicotine pouches could share their stories of how they stopped or reduced their use and could act as role models and support their peers in this area. Any group involving peer supports should be overseen by a responsible adult. In addition to an in-person group, there could be an online option, for example for youth who would prefer to stay anonymous.

Young people need intrinsic motivation and to feel ready to stop or reduce their vaping/use of nicotine pouches for any such attempts to be successful. However, alongside internal motivation, external motivation could also be helpful. For example, there could be **an app for youth to set and track their goals** (i.e., reductions in their vaping/nicotine pouch use over time). The app could include reminders that promote youth to take part in healthy alternatives to vaping/using nicotine pouches, as well as games to incentivize youth to stop or reduce their use of these products (i.e., gamifying the process, such as seeing a garden "grow" the less often youth vaped/ used nicotine pouches, and the more often they engaged in other activities instead, such as going for a walk, mindfulness exercises).

Specific recommendations for schools include:

* Offering more interactive and engaging sessions about vaping/nicotine pouches. For example, inviting young people who previously used these products to discuss their experiences and reasons for quitting, as opposed to only offering presentations by adults.
* Starting education about vaping and nicotine pouches before high school (i.e., elementary/ middle school). Such education could include harm-reduction approaches (e.g., knowing the contents and source of their products) so that if youth choose to vape/use nicotine pouches, they can do so as safely as possible.
* Posting vaping/nicotine pouch cessation resources on online platforms (e.g., Google classrooms, Teams) and in bathroom stalls (e.g., QR codes), to help youth access them more privately. Such resources should also be available in the counsellor's office.
* Using survey findings to create a lesson plan to facilitate non-judgmental discussions about vaping and nicotine pouches, and about how to create an understanding and compassionate school environment among all students.

Resources

For youth looking to reduce or stop their vape or nicotine pouch use

QuitNow is a BC-based service for those looking to reduce or quit tobacco and vape use. It is funded by the BC Government and delivered by the BC Lung Association. The service is available free-of-charge to all BC residents at ***quitnow.ca***.

HealthLink BC shares a variety of resources for those wanting to reduce or quit nicotine-related products, like vaping and nicotine pouches. Learn more at ***healthlinkbc.ca***.

Quash is a judgment-free app that helps youth quit or reduce smoking or vaping in a way that works for them. The app helps youth come up with a custom plan, and supports them through each stage of the quit process, including working through setbacks. The app includes interactive activities, streaks, and badges to help track and celebrate progress. Learn more at ***quashapp.com***, or find the Quash app on the ***Apple App Store*** or ***Google Play***.

I quit for me is a guide created by the Government of Canada to help youth who want to reduce or quit using tobacco, cigarettes, or vapes. The guide is non-judgmental and provides information about vaping and tobacco use. It has a quiz to help youth find out if they may be addicted to nicotine, and practical advice and strategies for youth who want to reduce or stop their use of these products. Learn more at: ***canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/i-quit-for-me-guide-youth.html***.

Foundry BC offers young people ages 12-24 health and wellness resources, services and supports available online and through integrated service centres in communities across BC. Learn more at ***foundrybc.ca/articles/vaping-tobacco/***.

For parents/guardians and school staff

The BC Government has created a variety of resources related to vaping and tobacco use for youth, parents/guardians, and other adult supports. This collection includes **The A-Z of vaping**, which explores the chemicals included in vapes and shares health information for youth and adults, tips for talking with teens, and resources for schools. Find these resources at ***gov.bc.ca/gov/content/vaping***.

The BC Ministry of Education and Child Care leads **erase BC**, an initiative aiming to promote safe, caring, and inclusive school communities. One of the available resources is an online learning series designed to help parents and caregivers in BC with substance use prevention at home. This series can be found at ***gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/mental-health-wellness/substance-use-prevention-series.pdf***. All mental health and substance use resources from **erase BC** can be found at ***gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase/mental-health-and-substance-use***.

Consider the Consequences of Vaping provides educational modules, activities, and information for educators to use with their students. Resources explore the facts and health risks related to vaping, and include interactive games for youth to learn about the cost of vaping and the products that contain nicotine. Find these resources at ***healthcanadaexperiences.ca/programs/consider-the-consequences-of-vaping/***.

Not an experiment shares information about vaping, its effects on physical and mental health, and how to have non-judgmental conversations about vaping with youth. Resources for parents can be found at ***notanexperiment.ca/parents/***. Resources for educators can be found at ***notanexperiment.ca/educators/***.

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