



Mott Poll Report

March 20, 2023
Volume 43
Issue 1

Are Parents Realistic about Whether their Child is Vaping?

Electronic cigarettes (often called e-cigarettes or vapes) are battery-operated devices that contain nicotine, which is inhaled as a mist. Using e-cigarettes is commonly known as vaping. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 11-18 years about vaping.

Most parents (91%) believe vaping is addictive, and 80% feel their child understands the health risks of vaping. In contrast, 16% of parents would rather their child vape than drink alcohol or use drugs, while 10% think vaping is not as bad for long-term health as smoking traditional cigarettes.

More parents of teens 15-18 years than children 11-14 report their child currently vapes (3% vs 1%) or has tried vaping in the past (13% vs 3%) and that their child's classmates or friends vape (30% vs 12%). Five percent of parents say they currently vape, while 18% have vaped in the past; parents who currently vape are more likely to report vaping for their child. Most parents believe they would *definitely* (48%) or *probably* (40%) know if their child was vaping. Parents indicate they would know by their child telling them (67%), finding vaping supplies in their child's things (57%), detecting it by smell (48%), or finding out from other people (37%).

If their child was caught vaping at school, about half of parents think an appropriate punishment would be suspension, either from school (31%) or from activities (22%); the others favor lesser consequences like detention (30%), a warning (12%), or no punishment (5%). If their child was caught vaping in a public place by police, parents think an appropriate punishment would be community service (30%), counseling/education (26%), or a warning (20%); few support fines (12%) or probation (3%) for vaping, and 9% do not support any punishment. Overall, 70% of parents believe the children themselves should be held responsible if they are caught vaping, while 53% say the seller of the vapes and 42% say parents should be held responsible.

Nearly three-quarters of parents (70%) believe more enforcement of laws against selling vapes to minors is likely to reduce vaping among children and teens. Fewer parents think that that increasing the tax on vapes (57%), limiting vape advertising on social media (52%), or requiring warning labels on vape product packaging (30%) is likely to reduce vaping among children and teens.

Strategies to reduce teen vaping

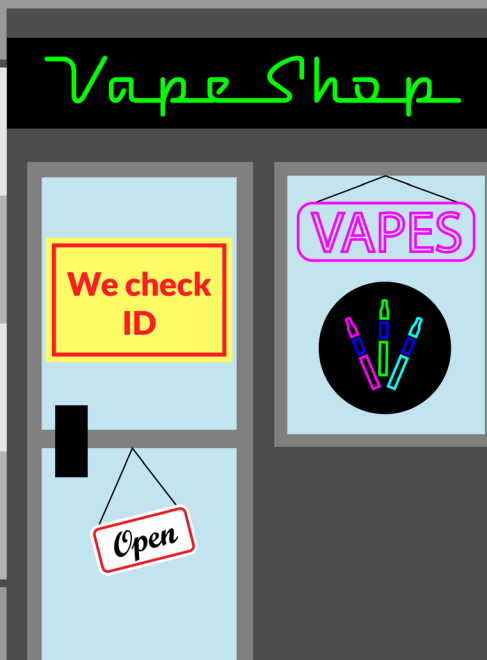
% of parents who think strategy would be effective

More enforcement of laws against selling to minors 70%

Increasing tax on vapes 57%

Limit advertisement on social media 52%

Require warning labels on vape packaging 30%



Report Highlights

Vaping is hard to detect, yet half of parents think they would definitely know if their child was vaping.

4 of 5 parents think their child understands the health risks of vaping.

About half of parents support suspension from school or school activities if their child was caught vaping at school.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in February 2023 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 0-18 years living in their household (n=2,100). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 62% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,325 parents with at least one child age 11-18. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 3 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.

C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Co-Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH
Co-Director: Susan J. Woolford, MD, MPH
Contributing Editor: Gary L. Freed, MD, MPH
Poll Manager: Dianne C. Singer, MPH
Data Analyst: Acham Gebremariam, MS
Publication Designer: Sara L. Schultz, MPS



**SUSAN B. MEISTER
CHILD HEALTH EVALUATION
AND RESEARCH CENTER**
MICHIGAN MEDICINE

Implications

Vaping has proliferated over the past decade, with hundreds of brands on the market and numerous options for purchasing. E-cigarettes were originally marketed as a healthier alternative to traditional cigarettes. Some parents believe this view, and would prefer their child vape instead of drinking or using other drugs.

However, vaping carries health risks such as chronic bronchitis, exacerbation of asthma, and swelling and irritation of the lungs. Over time, vaping can cause significant lung damage. Addiction to nicotine is also a health problem; trying to stop is difficult and can lead to symptoms of withdrawal. Additional risks can occur when adolescents put different substances in the vaping device, including marijuana and other drugs. Although 4 in 5 parents in this Mott Poll felt their child recognizes these risks, it may be unrealistic to expect adolescents to consider long-term health effects.

Very few parents in this Mott Poll believed their own child vapes, though they recognize that other children are vaping. National data from the CDC's National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS) found that in 2022, about 3% of middle schoolers and 14% of high school students vaped in the past 30 days. This relatively high level of vaping suggests that parents should not assume their child is not vaping.

Many parents are very confident they would know if their child vapes; however, detection may be more difficult than parents realize. Vaping does not leave behind the odor of cigarettes, and the fruity or sweet smell can easily be confused with gum or candy. Thus, vaping is easy to hide from teachers and parents, even when done in indoor areas like bedrooms, bathrooms and classrooms.

Most vaping devices have pods or cartridges that hold a liquid solution containing particles of nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals; an element that heats the liquid solution; a battery; and a mouthpiece. Puffing through the mouthpiece activates the heating device, which vaporizes the liquid in the cartridge; inhaling that vapor forces the particles down the person's throat and into the lungs. Parents might assume they will find these vaping devices or supplies if their child were vaping, the challenge is that they often look like common objects like USB flash drives or pens.

Many teens are using pre-packaged disposable vapes that are thrown away once the cartridge is empty. Disposable vapes are smaller than traditional vaping devices, easy to use, and easy to purchase at a variety of locations. It is likely that parents would have an especially hard time knowing if their child was using disposable vapes.

Whether or not parents think their child or teen is vaping, it's helpful to have a conversation about it. Parents can ask questions to find out what their child knows, whether they have tried vaping, and whether their friends or classmates are vaping. In a non-judgmental way, parents can explain why they think vaping is unhealthy. If their child is vaping, parents can work with their child to learn about strategies to quit, consulting the child's health care provider if necessary.

Parents also may want to talk with school officials about vaping policies and enforcement, whether vaping is covered in health education classes, and opportunities to educate parents about how to detect vaping. It's also helpful to talk with other parents about whether they are noticing possible signs of vaping – such as coughing or wheezing, or finding vaping supplies.

Although parents in this Mott Poll generally felt youth should be held responsible if caught vaping, they varied in how severe the consequences should be. Nearly equal numbers favor more serious consequences (e.g., suspension from school, probation or fines) as favor minor consequences (e.g., detention, warnings). This variability in parent opinions may make it difficult for school and community officials to enact vaping policies that include clear and consistent consequences. Parents showed solid support for more enforcement against selling vapes to minors as a strategy to reduce youth vaping.