



WHERE DO YOUTH GET THEIR E-CIGARETTES?

Where and how youth smokers get their e-cigarettes can vary considerably from state to state or city to city, depending on factors such as whether the jurisdiction strictly enforces the laws prohibiting tobacco sales to minors or requires retailers to keep all tobacco products behind the counter. Some youth buy the e-cigarettes they use, either directly from retailers or other kids, or by giving money to others to buy for them. Others get their cigarettes for free from social sources (usually other kids). According to the 2023 Monitoring the Future Survey, over half (54.7%) of 10th grade students say it would be easy to get vaping devices.¹

Social Sources of E-Cigarettes

Social sources, such as friends and classmates, are the most common source for accessing e-cigarettes among youth:

- According to the 2021 NYTS, 32.3% of youth e-cigarette users report getting e-cigarettes from a friend, the most commonly reported source for accessing e-cigarettes. Another 10.2% reported getting e-cigarettes from a family member.²
- The 2021 NYTS also found that 28.7% of youth e-cigarette users reported having someone else buy e-cigarettes for them, undermining the impact of youth access and age-of-sale laws.³
- A 2018 study found that among surveyed youth JUUL users (ages 12-17), half had gotten JUUL from a social source.⁴ While the up-front cost of some e-cigarettes, like JUUL, is high (a JUUL starter kit, which includes the device, charger and four JUULpods of various flavors, is \$29.99 on the JUUL website), there have been anecdotal reports of kids pooling together money to share a device and sell "hits" from the device to recoup the cost.

Social sources have to get the products they distribute from somewhere, so they likely purchased from the Internet or from a retail store before distributing to others.

In-Store Purchases of E-Cigarettes

While tremendous progress had been made in reducing youth access to cigarettes, research shows that e-cigarettes are significantly easier for underage youth to purchase than cigarettes. Underage purchase attempts of vaping products are 35% less likely to trigger an ID request and 42% more likely to result in a sales violation, compared to purchase attempts for cigarettes.⁵

- According to the 2021 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), 22.2% of youth e-cigarette users report obtaining e-cigarettes from a vape shop or tobacco shop in the past month and 17.7% from a gas station or convenience store.⁶
- Older data from the 2018 NYTS found that among youth who had tried to buy tobacco products, only one quarter reported that they were denied sale because of their age.⁷
- A study in *JAMA Pediatrics* found that in California, e-cigarette sales to minors violations are significantly higher in tobacco and vape shops than any other type of retailer, with 44.7% selling to underage buyers.⁸

Online Purchases of E-Cigarettes

Studies have found that youth successfully purchased e-cigarettes over the internet in 94 to 97 percent of their online purchase attempts.⁹ Many online retailers have not used adequate age verification,¹⁰ with some retailers simply requiring purchasers to check a box affirming that they are over age 18 to enter the site. According to the 2021 NYTS, 2.9% of youth e-cigarette users report buying e-cigarettes online.¹¹

In 2020, the Preventing All Cigarette Trafficking (PACT) Act was extended to cover e-cigarettes, which, among other things, required that online and remote sellers comply with all state, local, Tribal, and other applicable laws regarding tobacco sales, distribution, and delivery, including age verification.¹² In addition,

under the PACT Act, e-cigarettes cannot be mailed through the U.S. Postal Service, and other major delivery services, including FedEx¹³ and DHL¹⁴ have stopped allowing shipping of e-cigarettes. However, a recent study found that, despite the PACT Act restrictions placed on e-cigarettes, online e-cigarette vendors still do not use adequate age-verification methods that would prevent youth purchasing, and while many private delivery companies have opened to ship products for online vendors, some continue to list USPS as their delivery service.¹⁵

Making it More Difficult for Kids to Buy E-Cigarettes Reduces Youth Smoking

Research shows that making obtaining tobacco products as inconvenient, difficult and expensive as possible for kids reduces both the number of kids who try or regularly use tobacco products.¹⁶ To the extent that these measures directly affect youth who buy their own e-cigarettes or be sources for other youth, then they can also reduce the supply to other kids.

On December 20, 2019, President Trump signed legislation to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, and raise the federal minimum age of sale of tobacco products from 18 to 21 years, effective immediately. While raising the tobacco sale age to 21 is a significant milestone, age restrictions alone are insufficient to reduce youth access.

Restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products is an important strategy that can help reduce youth access to e-cigarettes. According to the 2022 NYTS, 84.9% of youth e-cigarette users use flavored e-cigarettes¹⁷ and according to the PATH study, 70.3% say they use e-cigarettes “because they come in flavors I like.”¹⁸ Restricting or prohibiting the sale of flavored e-cigarettes will therefore reduce the availability of the products most popular among youth. At least 360 localities and 5 states have passed restrictions or complete prohibitions on the sale of flavored e-cigarettes, along with other flavored tobacco products.¹⁹

Increasing the price of e-cigarettes is an effective way to discourage youth use because youth are particularly price sensitive.²⁰ Price hikes may also make it less likely that parents and other adults will give e-cigarettes to kids.

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¹ University of Michigan, 2023 Monitoring the Future Study, *Trends in the Availability of Drugs as Perceived by 10th Graders*, <https://monitoringthefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/mf2023table8.pdf>.

² Gentzke, A, et al., “Tobacco Product Use and Associated Factors Among Middle and High School Students—National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2021,” *MMWR* 71(5):1-29, March 10, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/ss/pdfs/ss7105a1-H.pdf>.

³ Gentzke, A, et al., “Tobacco Product Use and Associated Factors Among Middle and High School Students—National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2021,” *MMWR* 71(5):1-29, March 10, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/ss/pdfs/ss7105a1-H.pdf>.

⁴ Truth Initiative, “Where are kids getting JUUL?” May 29, 2018, <https://truthinitiative.org/news/where-are-kids-getting-juul>.

⁵ Levinson, AH, et al., “Asking for Identification and Retail Tobacco Sales to Minors,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 145(5), 2020.

⁶ Gentzke, A, et al., “Tobacco Product Use and Associated Factors Among Middle and High School Students—National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2021,” *MMWR* 71(5):1-29, March 10, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/ss/pdfs/ss7105a1-H.pdf>.

⁷ Liu, ST, et al., “Youth Access to Tobacco Products in the United States, 2016-2018,” *Tobacco Regulatory Science* 5(6):491-501, 2019.

⁸ Roeseler, A, et al., “Assessment of Underage Sales Violations in Tobacco Stores and Vape Shops,” *JAMA Pediatrics*, published online June 24, 2019.

⁹ Williams, RS, Derrick J, & Ribisl, KM, “Electronic cigarette sales to minors via the internet.” *JAMA Pediatrics* 169(3):e1563, doi:

10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.63, Epub March 2, 2015. Nikitin, D, Timberlake, DS, & Williams, RS, “Is the E-Liquid Industry Regulating Itself? A Look at E-Liquid Internet Vendors in the United States,” *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* 18(10):1967-72, 2016.

¹⁰ Williams, RS, et al., “Content analysis of age verification, purchase and delivery methods of internet e-cigarette vendors, 2013 and 2014,” *Tobacco Control* 27(3):287-293, 2018.

¹¹ Gentzke, A, et al., “Tobacco Product Use and Associated Factors Among Middle and High School Students—National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2021,” *MMWR* 71(5):1-29, March 10, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/ss/pdfs/ss7105a1-H.pdf>. Older data from the 2019 YRBS found that 3.6% of middle and high school e-cigarette users under 18 report buying e-cigarettes from the Internet. See Creamer, M., et al., “Tobacco Product Use Among High School Students—Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2019,” *MMWR* 69(1):56-63, August 21, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/su/pdfs/su6901a7-H.pdf>.

¹² Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), Vapes and E-Cigarettes, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.atf.gov/alcohol-tobacco/vapes-and-e-cigarettes>.

¹³ FedEx, Tobacco shipping is prohibited, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.fedex.com/en-us/shipping/guidelines-for-shipping-tobacco.html>.

¹⁴ DHL, Dangerous Goods & Prohibited Items, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.dhl.com/global-en/home/our-divisions/freight/customer-service/dangerous-goods-and-prohibited-items.html>.

¹⁵ Bertrand, A, et al., "Easy access: identification verification and shipping methods used by online vape shops," *Tobacco Control*, Published Online First: 08 January 2024. doi: 10.1136/tc-2023-058303.

¹⁶ See related Campaign fact sheets, *Raising Cigarette Taxes Reduces Smoking, Especially Among Kids (and the Cigarette Companies Know It)*, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0146.pdf> and *Enforcing Laws Prohibiting Cigarette Sales to Kids Reduces Youth Smoking*, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0049.pdf>.

¹⁷ Cooper, M et al., "E-Cigarette Use Among Middle and High School Students—United States, 2022," *MMWR* 71(40):1283-1285, October 7, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/pdfs/mm7140a3-H.pdf>.

¹⁸ FDA, "Modifications to Compliance Policy for Certain Deemed Products: Guidance for Industry, Draft Guidance," March 13, 2019, <https://www.fda.gov/media/121384/download>.

¹⁹ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, *States & Localities That Have Restricted the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products*, <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0398.pdf>.

²⁰ Pesko, MF, et al., "E-cigarette price sensitivity among middle- and high-school students: evidence from Monitoring the Future," *Addiction* 113(5):896-906, May 2018.