

# Teen vaping is on the rise, and like cigarettes, health risks are huge

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A selection of the popular Juul brand vaping supplies on display in the window of a vaping store in New York in March 2018.  
Photo: Richard B. Levine/Sipa USA/TNS

The students wait eagerly for their teachers to turn their backs.

That's their cue to reach quietly for a small, sleek device they can easily conceal in their palms. It resembles a flash drive, but instead of computer files, this device stores nicotine. Nicotine is the addictive chemical in tobacco.

They take a hit, sucking on the device as they would a cigarette. Then, "they blow into their backpacks ... or into their sweater when the teacher isn't looking," said Elijah Luna, 16, a sophomore at Vista del Lago High School outside of Sacramento, California.

The vapor cloud is so small and dissipates so quickly that teachers are usually none the wiser, Luna said. He added he has never tried it himself.

The device is a Juul, a popular electronic cigarette that's a sensation among teens, especially in wealthier neighborhoods. It has become a nightmare for school administrators and public health professionals.

"I think this is going to be the health problem of the decade," said Milagros Vascones-Gatski. She is a substance abuse counselor at Yorktown High School in Arlington, Virginia.

### **Addiction And Other Health Risks**

In nearly 17 years working with teens, Vascones-Gatski said, she has never seen a tobacco product become so popular so quickly. Three to four students are caught smoking e-cigarettes, usually Juuls, on campus each week, and some are suspended, she said.

Vascones-Gatski, along with other concerned educators and health care advocates, consider "Juuling" to be a serious problem. E-cigarettes are high in nicotine. So they fear the devices are extremely addictive for this vulnerable population.

To combat the spread of the devices, some schools have banned flash drives as well. They want to avoid confusion between the items. Yorktown High even removed the main entrance doors from student bathrooms at the beginning of the school year to curb students from vaping inside. Despite these efforts, teens across America continue using the stuff in class, in hallways, in restrooms, and at school sports.

### **Equal To A Pack Of Cigarettes**

Because it is referred to as Juuling, not smoking or vaping, some students may think it's harmless, said Pamela Ling, a professor at the University of California-San Francisco School of Medicine. "They may not even know it contains nicotine."

It does have a significant amount of nicotine. One Juul "pod," the nicotine cartridge inserted into the smoking device and heated, delivers about 200 puffs. This is about as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes, according to the product website.

Assuming a teen smokes one pod a week, "in five weeks, that's like 100 cigarettes," Ling said. "By that point, you're considered an established smoker."

### **Smoking In Secret Is Still Smoking**

E-cigarettes, also known as vapes, are battery-operated devices that heat up liquid nicotine to generate vapor smoke that users breathe in. Smoking e-cigs is more secretive and easier to get away with than traditional cigarettes.

In 2016, California increased the minimum age to buy tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, from 18 to 21. Experts predicted the change would make it harder for teens to get tobacco products from their slightly older friends. This seems to be working, according to a recent report.

However, some health care professionals worry devices like the Juul could reverse the progress.

The manufacturer, Juul Labs, said the device is exclusively for adult use. However, it appeals to youths for several reasons. It can be easily charged on a laptop, its decal covers come in colorful designs, and the pods are available in flavors such as mint and crème brûlée.

The odor Juuls produce could easily be mistaken for a body oil or spray.

## **Company Says It Wants To Help**

Juul Labs said it wants to help schools get its products off their campuses. Spokeswoman Christine Castro said the company has created lessons to educate youth about Juul and nicotine addiction, with input from teachers. It's available for any interested school, she said.

"This product is solely for adult smokers," Castro said. "We absolutely condemn kids using our products."

Castro said the company limits online purchases to individuals age 21 or older. To visit the site, you need only click on a box pledging you are of age. To buy it, you fill out a user form. That information is verified through several databases and, if that fails, customers must upload a photo with proof of age, she said.

She urged people to report suspicious sales to the company's [youthprevention@juul.com](mailto:youthprevention@juul.com) email address. Juul Labs may follow up with secret shopper visits to stores suspected of selling the product to underage customers, she said.

If users get through the age-verification process online, they can buy a Juul starter kit. This includes the vaping pen and four pods for \$50. That's expensive for most high school students and why Juuling might be more common in wealthy communities. "In order to vape, you need money," Vascones-Gatski said, noting most students at her high school either work or receive big allowances.

## **"The Access Is Too Easy"**

Vince Willmore, from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, applauds efforts taken by schools, but he thinks the burden should not fall solely on educators and parents. The government's Food and Drug Administration "regulates tobacco products ... and we think it's important that the FDA take action to protect kids from Juul and other e-cigarettes," he said.

Last year, the FDA delayed laws that could have stopped the sale of many e-cigarette products, possibly including the Juul. The FDA is studying whether these devices might actually help longtime smokers quit traditional cigarettes. “That basically locked in the products that are in the market for another four years,” Willmore said.

Meanwhile, schools continue the battle.

At Needham High School in Massachusetts, Principal Aaron Sicotte said e-cigarettes started appearing on his campus last school year. Soon, Juul became the most popular brand.

The school has alerted staff “so that when these fall out of students’ bags, teachers don’t hand them back,” he said.

While the hype surrounding Juul might die down, Sicotte does not expect e-cigs to go away. “The access is too easy, the draw is too great, and the push through advertising is too significant,” he said.

Quiz

- 1 Which section of the article highlights Juul Labs' commitment to preventing the underage use of Juuls?
  - (A) "Addiction And Other Health Risks"
  - (B) "Smoking In Secret Is Still Smoking"
  - (C) "Company Says It Wants To Help"
  - (D) "The Access Is Too Easy"
  
- 2 Which quote from the article BEST explains WHY e-cigarettes are so popular with teens?
  - (A) "I think this is going to be the health problem of the decade," said Milagros Vascones-Gatski.
  - (B) "In order to vape, you need money," Vascones-Gatski said, noting most students at her high school either work or receive big allowances.
  - (C) "That basically locked in the products that are in the market for another four years," Willmore said.
  - (D) "The access is too easy, the draw is too great, and the push through advertising is too significant," he said.
  
- 3 Which of the following accurately characterizes Vascones-Gatski's reaction to Juuling?
  - (A) interested to learn whether the habit could be a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes
  - (B) concerned that the habit will cause teens to develop an addiction to nicotine
  - (C) disappointed that schools have been unable to convince students of the dangers of the habit
  - (D) involved in petitioning the FDA to release information about the habit's long-term effects
  
- 4 Which of the following people or groups discussed in the article would be MOST likely to agree with the idea that Juuls and other e-cigarettes may have beneficial effects?
  - (A) the state of California
  - (B) the FDA
  - (C) Aaron Sicotte
  - (D) Pamela Ling

