

Youth in Canada and U.S. vaping more than ever

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A new generation of e-cigarettes with higher levels of nicotine could be the reason that more adolescents in Canada and the U.S. are vaping more than ever before.

Researchers at the University of Waterloo examined rates of vaping and smoking in Canada, the U.S. and England among youth aged 16 to 19. The study found that between 2017 and 2018, the number of adolescents saying they had vaped within the last 30 days jumped by five per cent in the U.S., eight per cent in Canada, while England remained fairly steady.



“Prior to 2017, many youths were experimenting with e-cigarettes, but it was very hard to find regular users,” said David Hammond, a professor in the School of Public Health and Health Systems at Waterloo. “In 2018, not only were more youth in Canada and the U.S. trying e-cigarettes, but there was also a shift toward more frequent use.”

The study also found that the percentage of Canadian adolescents who reported usually using the JUUL brand of vaping device rose from 0 to 10 per cent in the first month of its release in Canada in August 2018, and tripled in the U.S. over the same time period.

JUUL, which has nicotine concentrations of up to 50 mg and is known for its sleek design, now makes up half the U.S. e-cigarette market. Previous devices delivered between 3 and 24 mg, and England’s regulations have capped nicotine content at 20 mg.

“E-cigarettes have the potential to help adult smokers to quit; however, e-cigarettes need to be targeted more effectively at adult smokers to avoid creating a new generation of nicotine users,” said Hammond. “We have yet to achieve the optimal regulatory balance, and the findings support urgent action to reduce youth vaping – including greater restrictions on advertising and youth access.”

The study also found that smoking rates in Canada may have increased between 2017 and 2018. “Youth smoking rates have been declining for several decades in Canada, and represent one of the most significant public health achievements,” said Hammond. “If the current findings are replicated in other studies, the progress in reducing youth smoking may be under threat.”

The study surveyed more than 24,000 youth between 16 and 19 years old as part of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC) Youth Tobacco and Vaping Survey.

The study, “Prevalence of vaping and smoking among adolescents in Canada, England, and the United States: repeat national cross-sectional surveys,” was authored by David Hammond, Jessica Reid, Vicki Rynard, Geoffrey Fong, K. Michael Cummings, Ann McNeill, Sara Hitchman, James Thrasher, Maciej

Goniewicz, Maansi Bansal-Travers, Richard O'Connor, David Levy, Ron Borland, and Christine White, and appears in the British Medical Journal.