

Youth Vaping in Mississippi

Findings from Virtual Focus Groups of MS High School Students

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MS Tobacco Data

Introduction

- ▶ Virtual focus groups were conducted with Mississippi high school students to explore perceptions, beliefs, social norms, usage, and access to e-cigarettes and other tobacco products.

Method

- ▶ From April to May 2021 a total of 120 Mississippi high school students participated in 26 virtual focus groups using [Zoom](#). The participants were a convenience sample who were paid \$100 for their participation.
- ▶ Overall, the sample of 120 high school students [demographics](#) were as follows: female 87 male 33 and white 96 black 22 other 2. One in five (20%) attended private schools and 44% of the sample attended Madison public schools. Another 18% attended public schools in the Brandon area and the remaining 18% were a mixture of city, suburban, and rural high school students in MS.

Why Teens Vape

- ▶ Peer pressure, social status, influence, "clout"
- ▶ Drawn to new technology and trends
- ▶ To "get a buzz" from nicotine or other substances
- ▶ "Cleaner" smell
- ▶ Variety of flavors
- ▶ Lots of choices for devices and brands
- ▶ Easily obtained from convenience stores, other students, older siblings, etc.
- ▶ Easy to conceal with small devices and no strong smell
- ▶ Fun
- ▶ Addictive
- ▶ Stress relief

Beliefs

- ▶ “the cigarette craze for the new technological era”
- ▶ “normal”
- ▶ “not a big deal”

Knowledge

- ▶ Marketed to their age group
- ▶ Legal age is 21
 - ▶ Prevent seniors from having legal access to vapes
 - ▶ Decrease access to vapes for even younger teens
 - ▶ Vaping is too widespread now
- ▶ Addictive, but less harmful
- ▶ What is in the vape liquid?

Addictiveness

- ▶ Addiction develops faster with vapes than with cigarettes because of the **high levels of nicotine** options that are available.
- ▶ Repeated use leads teens to vape more frequently.
- ▶ No confidential **resources** to help them with nicotine addiction.

Access

- ▶ Easy access
- ▶ Sharing vapes at school
- ▶ Gas stations
- ▶ Vape dealers
- ▶ Parents or friend's parents

Popular Vapes

- ▶ Popular brands - Juul, Alto, and Puff Bar
 - ▶ Smaller and easy to conceal
 - ▶ Cheap and disposable

Flavors

- ▶ Social exchanges
- ▶ Younger teens - fruity, candy flavors
- ▶ Older teens - none, mint

Cost

- ▶ Vaping is **expensive**
 - ▶ \$20/week
 - ▶ Vape dealers - \$10 to \$15
 - ▶ Vape products - skins/sleeves

Vapes vs. Cigarettes

- ▶ Vaping is appealing
 - ▶ Targeted to young people
 - ▶ Taste and smell better
 - ▶ Less offensive to others
 - ▶ Easier to conceal
 - ▶ Less harmful, but not safe
- ▶ Cigarettes are unappealing
 - ▶ Would never consider smoking a conventional cigarette because of the **smell**, **taste**, and **smoke**.
 - ▶ “**gross**”
 - ▶ Only teens with **serious problems** or teens who are **intoxicated** would be likely to smoke cigarettes.

Vaping leads to smoking?

Half of participants had heard that young people who use e-cigarettes could be more likely to smoke conventional cigarettes in the future.

- ▶ **Believable**

- ▶ Vape is unavailable
- ▶ Student athletes switching from vape to smokeless tobacco

- ▶ **Unbelievable**

- ▶ the smell and taste of cigarettes are considered gross or disgusting.

Vaping at School

- ▶ Participants, including those who do not vape, expressed **indifference** about teens vaping at school. They would repeat sentiments such as “... it’s their choice if they want to vape or not.”
- ▶ Even among those who consider vaping on campus to be a serious problem, no one thought they should personally respond by telling school faculty or staff about students who are vaping.

First encounters

- ▶ Participants consistently reported that they first encountered vapes in middle school in **sixth**, **seventh**, or **eighth** grade when they started to see peers and older students vaping.
- ▶ Most encounter vaping among their peers **before they receive anti-vaping education**.

Anti-Vape campaigns

- ▶ Particularly important in the **middle-school grades** as that is when students are **first exposed to vaping**, and are **vulnerable** because the **novelty of vaping** is more appealing to younger teens.
- ▶ Participants consider **addiction more of a problem for older teens** and they consider advertisements and **messaging less effective** among this group who are more likely to be nicotine dependent.
- ▶ Shocking but informative
- ▶ “ugly, scary, and informative”
- ▶ Good Campaigns
 - ▶ Truth
 - ▶ Real Cost
 - ▶ Social media such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram
 - ▶ Television and Spotify

Teen Ideas for Anti-vape Campaigns

- ▶ Scary factual health messages
- ▶ Before and after stories of vape addicts
- ▶ Scary personal stories like the anti-smoking ads

- ▶ Influencers
 - ▶ Have popular people talk about harmful effects of vaping
 - ▶ Have celebrities lead the Truth ads

- ▶ Policy-related ideas
 - ▶ Raise the price so that vaping becomes cost-prohibitive
 - ▶ Stricter punishments for breaking the rules and laws
 - ▶ Get rid of the claim that vapes are safer than cigarettes

- ▶ Provide more specific information about vapes and about toxins, metals, and chemicals in vapes
- ▶ Have young people come to their own conclusions

Exposure

- ▶ Primary exposure from **peers**, **older siblings**, and **friends**.
- ▶ Frequent exposure in **school bathrooms**, in **vehicles** with friends, and at **school sporting events**.
- ▶ Students have also seen their peers vape in class by putting their heads in book bags or blowing it in their sleeve when the teacher's back is turned.
 - ▶ **“ghosting”**
- ▶ After school, students vape in **parking lots**, vehicles, and **school buses**.

Secondhand Aerosol

- ▶ Secondhand vape aerosol is thought of differently compared to secondhand cigarette smoke
 - ▶ Improvement over secondhand cigarette smoke
 - ▶ Can cause headaches
 - ▶ Makes some sick and nauseous
 - ▶ More participants said they are usually not bothered by it

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