

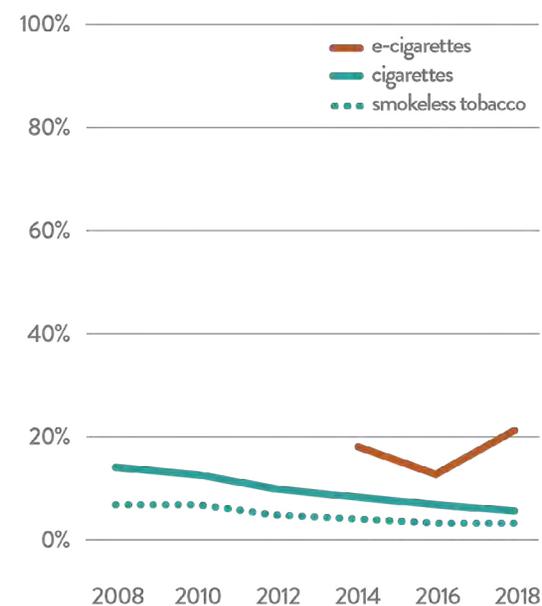
YOUTH + YOUNG ADULTS

Preventing Youth + Young Adult Use of Commercial Tobacco

While cigarette smoking has declined for all age groups over the past decade, use of e-cigarettes has increased significantly among youth. National data tells the same story: between 2017 and 2018, e-cigarette use increased 78% among high school students and 48% among middle school students.¹ As with adults, some youth are more likely to use commercial tobacco products, contributing to lifelong addiction, disease and premature death. According to the Washington Healthy Youth Survey (HYS), the following youth populations use commercial tobacco at disproportionately high rates: American Indian/Alaska Native students, LGBTQ students, students with lower grades, students who experience bullying, and students who speak Russian or Ukrainian at home.²

There is also evidence that youth who use commercial tobacco products are more likely to have a behavioral health disorder, including depression, anxiety, stress, disruptive behaviors (e.g. ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder), and alcohol and drug use.³ It is unclear whether there is a causal pathway between commercial tobacco use and other behavioral health conditions, or if youth with these disorders are more likely to use commercial tobacco.

USE TRENDS AMONG 10TH GRADERS*



**The question assessing past 30-day e-cigarette use was revised more than once between 2012 and 2018, which may influence responses. Please see askhys.net for additional information.*

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NICOTINE + YOUTH

Nicotine is especially harmful to adolescent brains. Youth who use nicotine-containing products may be more likely to develop addictions to other substances, perform poorly in academics, and experience other behavioral disorders. Additionally, e-cigarette use is strongly associated with the use of other commercial tobacco products among youth and young adults, including conventional cigarettes.¹

EMERGING PRODUCTS

The commercial tobacco and e-cigarette industries know they must attract youth to their products in order to maintain profitability and find replacement customers. They continue to diversify and introduce new products to get youth addicted to nicotine. The increased use of e-cigarettes by youth was largely fueled by the introduction of “pod-based systems.” These are small, sometimes rechargeable devices that aerosolize high concentrations of nicotine, flavoring agents, and other contents encapsulated in cartridges. They also use nicotine salts rather than freebase nicotine, which allows high concentrations of nicotine to be inhaled much more smoothly by the user.

The industry has also advertised e-cigarettes as a safe alternative to cigarettes, a message that youth have heard. The HYS reported that a third (35%) of 10th grade youth perceived great harm from using electronic cigarettes regularly, compared to 74% from smoking one or more packs of cigarettes daily. The industry has also introduced new nicotine products to overcome existing regulations.

POLICIES TO SUPPORT YOUTH PREVENTION

Community-wide policies are a proven practice for reducing youth commercial tobacco use and preventing initiation. Washington has several state- and community-wide policies in place to support youth and young adults:

- **Tobacco and Vapor 21** (2020): Made it illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone under 21 years old;
- **Smoking in Public Places** (2005): Prohibits smoking inside public places and workplaces, and outdoors within 25 feet; and
- **Local Vaping in Public Places ordinances:** Local policies that prohibit e-cigarette use where smoking is not allowed. There are currently 12 county-wide local policies covering 76% of Washingtonians from secondhand aerosol.

PREVENTING YOUTH USE

In the 2021-2025 Washington State Commercial Tobacco Prevention and Control Five-Year Strategic Plan, the following policies were identified to prevent the use of commercial tobacco among youth and young adults.

- Adequately funding a comprehensive tobacco and vapor product prevention and control program;
- Prohibiting the sale of flavored commercial tobacco products, including menthol;
- Taxing vapor products;
- Regulating advertising and marketing;
- Regulating density and zoning of stores; and
- Banning vaping in public places.

PREVENTION EFFORTS IN WASHINGTON STATE

Current efforts underway in Washington to address youth use of commercial tobacco include:

- Collaborating with partners in response to increasing use of and dependence on emerging commercial tobacco products by youth, including youth access and marketing;
- Collaborating with K-12 schools to engage guardians and school personnel about the evolving commercial tobacco landscape, harms of use, and benefits of prevention interventions;
- Establishing and strengthening commercial tobacco-free policies on campuses, with emphasis on community and technical colleges;
- Linking health care providers with culturally appropriate, trauma-informed tools and training to screen for tobacco use and dependence and to provide support to youth from diverse communities; and
- Providing youth and young adult tobacco use and dependence treatment interventions, such as the vaping cessation app, This is Quitting, and the Washington State Quitline.

references:

1. US Department of Health and Human Services. *E-cigarette use among youth and young adults: a report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health; 2016.
2. *Tobacco-Related Disparities in Washington State: Tobacco is a Health Equity Problem Handout*. 2015
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2012.