

Youth Vaping Rate Remains Low: New Research Challenges Misconceptions

In recent years, there has been growing concern about the prevalence of vaping among young people and its potential to act as a gateway to smoking. However, new research commissioned by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and conducted by YouGov suggests that these fears may be largely unfounded. The study reveals that youth vaping rates remain low and that vaping is not acting as a gateway to youth smoking. In this article, we will delve into the key findings of the research and explore the implications for public health and policy.

Declining Numbers

Contrary to popular belief, the number of young people aged 11-18 who have tried vaping has actually decreased slightly in recent years. The research shows a marginal decline from 16% in 2018 to 15.4% in 2019. Moreover, the proportion of young people who vape regularly, defined as once a week or more, has also decreased slightly. Only 0.6% of respondents reported vaping daily, compared to 0.9% in 2018. This data suggests that vaping remains uncommon among young people.

Vaping Occasional

While regular vaping has declined, there has been a slight increase in the number of young people who vape occasionally or less than once a week. The percentage of young people who claimed to vape occasionally rose from 3.4% to 4.9%. However, it is important to note that these occasional users represent a small portion of the overall youth population.

Vaping Behavior among Non-Smokers

One of the key findings of the research is that regular e-cigarette use is predominantly limited to current or ex-tobacco smokers among young people. A staggering 93.8% of 11-18 year olds who have never smoked either have never used an e-cigarette (87.8%) or are not even aware of them (6.0%). This finding debunks the notion that vaping is a gateway to smoking among non-smokers.

Low Experimentation Rates

The research also highlights that only a small percentage (5.5%) of young people who have never smoked have ever tried e-cigarettes. Furthermore, not a single young non-smoker reported vaping daily. The majority of young non-smokers who had tried vaping stated that their main reason for doing so was simply to give it a try (rather than being influenced by the perception of vaping as cool).

Misconceptions and Harm Perception

While the study reveals encouraging trends regarding vaping rates, it also sheds light on the increasing number of young people who hold misconceptions about the harm associated with e-cigarettes. The proportion of young people who incorrectly believe that e-cigarettes are as harmful as tobacco cigarettes has risen from 21% in 2015 to 30% in 2019. This misconception underscores the need for accurate information and education surrounding the relative risks of vaping and smoking.

Sources of E-Cigarettes

For the first time, the research investigated where young people usually obtain their e-cigarettes. The majority (61.9%) stated that they bought them, with shops being the most common source at 44.4%. Online purchases accounted for 24.5% of the total. Additionally, 35.2% reported receiving e-cigarettes as gifts, with friends being the primary source at 24.5%.

Expert Opinions

Deborah Arnott, the chief executive of ASH, emphasizes the importance of ongoing monitoring of e-cigarette use among young people. While acknowledging the need for vigilance, Arnott points out that the decline in smoking prevalence among children and young adults in Britain since 2010 does not indicate that vaping has acted as a gateway into smoking. Furthermore, there is little evidence to support the perception that vaping is a "super-cool" trend among young people in the UK, as it is often portrayed in the United States.

John Dunne, a board member of the UK Vaping Industry Association, highlights that the latest statistics challenge the notion that vaping serves as a gateway to smoking. With smoking rates and exposure to tobacco harm continuing to decrease, vaping provides a less harmful alternative for smokers. Recent research has even shown that vapers are three times more likely to quit smoking compared to non-vapers.

Conclusion

The YouGov research commissioned by ASH provides valuable insights into the vaping habits of young people in the UK. It demonstrates that youth vaping rates remain low and vaping is not acting as a gateway to youth smoking. However, there is a need to address the misconceptions surrounding the harm associated with e-cigarettes and ensure accurate information is accessible to young people. Ongoing monitoring and education efforts are crucial in maintaining the positive downward trend in smoking prevalence among young individuals.