

Position Paper

E-cigarettes and the escalating rates of youth vaping

Recommendation:

Increasing the minimum age of legal access to 21

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INTRODUCTION

Evidence indicates that Canada's youth vaping rates continue to rise, often more than doubling each year depending on province¹. The e-cigarette industry has targeted persuasive marketing at the youth consumer. One vape pod can have as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes². E-cigarettes have replaced cigarettes as the most efficient way of consuming nicotine³. The devices are small, discreet and can be used anywhere.

Teens who vape are four times more likely to experiment with tobacco⁴. Studies have shown that a younger age of initiation into vaping and cigarette smoking increases the likelihood of long-term addition to nicotine⁵.

As a result, Canada is raising a new generation addicted to nicotine.

Some provinces are taking aggressive steps to make vaping less attractive to teenagers. Nova Scotia was the first to ban the sale of flavored e-cigarettes and juices and is pushing for adult only tobacco locations. Other provinces are slowly following suit, and further restrictions on marketing at gas stations and convince stores are being put into place⁶. There are significant variations on regulations and restrictions regarding marketing and sales of e-cigarettes and juices to youth, from province to province.

The Canadian Cancer Society is calling for the Canadian government to make tobacco and vaping sale and marketing regulations federally mandated, and to raise the minimum age of legal access (MLA) to 21.

COUNTER ARGUMENT:

Vaping was original developed as a potential tool to help cigarette smokers quit smoking. There is little convincing long-term research or resulting evidence to support that adult cigarette smokers are successfully using vaping as a means of cessation⁷. Failure rates of quitting smoking by switching to vaping are as high as 85 per cent, and dual users are often the result⁸.

The Canadian Vaping Association quotes an international review of independent researchers as finding that using vaping as a cessation tool is 70 per cent more effective than any other nicotine replacement therapy. It also, however, reports that one third of smokers have never tried an e-cigarette and fewer than 20 percent are using vaping as a cessation strategy⁹.

This is because vaping has simply not been marketed toward adult smokers who are trying to quit. Increasing the minimum age of legal access to 21 would have very little impact on the small percentage of adult smokers who may be using vaping as a cessation tool.



CAMH OSDUHS

Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) has been conducted every two years since 1977, making it the longest-running school survey of adolescents in Canada, and one of the longest-running in the world.

Survey Participants:

- 14,142 Students
- Grades 7-12
- 992 Classes
- 263 Schools
- 47 School Boards



SUPPORTING ARGUMENT:

A recent Ontario based report released by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health suggests that while cigarette and alcohol use among Ontario teens has declined, vaping rates have more than doubled, from 11 per cent to 23 per cent in the past three years³.

More enlightening, the CAMH report looks at **why** teens start vaping and how they use it cope, mentally, in their daily lives.

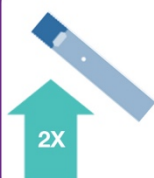
Vaping is a popular choice with teens because it's used as a stress reliever and a socialization opportunity. "Vape breaks" and showing off new "clouding tricks" become a way to fit in, and an addictive habit. Unlike smoke breaks, vaping is easy to hide from parents and teachers.¹⁰ As usage rates grow peer pressure informs the decision to start vaping, and quitting seems an unpopular choice.

Vaping has no natural "dose" ending, the way finishing a cigarette does. Newer vaping devices such as Juul or Vype deliver high concentrations of nicotine through what's become known as "nicotine salts", without the throat burn of cigarettes¹⁰. It is easy to lose track of how much highly addictive nicotine one has consumed.

The packaging of vaping products does not clearly label health risks of vaping, but instead have marketed e-cigarettes to create a personalized experience to a younger demographic⁸. The decision to start vaping lacks any context of health risk.



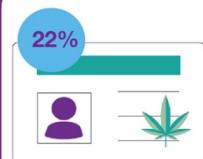
2019 OSDUHS Key Findings



23% of students (an estimated 184,200) reported using an electronic cigarette in the past year. Past year electronic cigarette use doubled between 2017 and 2019, from 11% to 23%.



Among high school students, consuming cannabis edibles significantly increased from 11% in 2017 to 14% in 2019.



In 2019, about one in five (22%) students reported using cannabis in the past year.



Between 1999 and 2019, there was a significant downward trend in drug use, with two exceptions: electronic cigarettes and non-medical use of ADHD drugs.



When asked about the perceived risk of physical harm associated with various substances, both elementary and high school students believed that trying marijuana and using electronic cigarettes regularly are considered to be the least risky.

Increasing the MLA to 21 would make it illegal for high-school students to purchase tobacco products. It would also create a significant age gap between youth vapers and those adults willing to purchase on their behalf. Fellow classmates buying for younger students would no longer be a daily lunch break option.

Raising the legal vaping age to 21 would also, quite simply, give the cerebral cortex in teen brains more time to fully develop before having to wrestle with impulse control and addiction.

CONCLUSION

If the minimum age of legal access to e-cigarettes was raised to 21, it would effectively remove the legal purchaser from the high school setting. It would also create a significant age gap between youth vapers and those adults willing to purchase on their behalf. This would reduce supply access and vaping's usage rates would drop. It would allow time for maturing cognitive functions in youth, to better cope with impulse control and addiction issues. Increasing the MLA would also, effectively, decrease the popularity and social value of vaping and motives for its use to fit in with peers or relieve stress⁵.



Further, if aggressive restrictions regarding the sale of flavoured e-cigarette and juices products, visual market restrictions, and adult only stores selling products became regulated federally consistency across the provinces would be achieved. The Maritime Provinces, for example, are geographically very close to each other but have varied restrictions in place.

In December 2019 the US federal government increased the legal smoking age to 21, which includes cigarettes and vaping liquids, in an attempt to prevent a new generation from becoming dependent on nicotine. Canada must follow suit.

END NOTES

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