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**Health**

**Is youth smoking gaining popularity because of vaping products?**

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Image 1. A lighted cigarette burns, creating smoke. Photo by: Pexels/Pixabay

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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NEW YORK, New York — The number of U.S. kids who smoke cigarettes is no longer falling. Health officials blame youth vaping.

For decades, the percentage of high school and middle school students who smoked cigarettes had been declining fairly steadily. For the past three years, it has flattened, according to new numbers released February 11, 2019.

There may be several reasons, but a recent boom in vaping is the most likely explanation, said Brian King. He works at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC.

**School Survey Of Smoking**

King stated that they had been getting kids to stop smoking. Now, though, e-cigarettes are becoming popular with kids and have completely stopped their progress.

Image 2. Different varieties of e-cigarettes. Photo by: Sarah Johnson/Wikimedia

"We were making progress, and now you have the introduction of a product that is heavily popular among youth that has completely erased that progress," King said.

The CDC findings come from a national survey conducted last spring of more than 20,000 middle and high school students. It asked if they had used any tobacco products in the previous month. Some of the findings had been released before, including the boom in vaping.

Experts think vaping has increased because of the exploding popularity of newer versions of e-cigarettes, like those by Juul Labs Inc. of San Francisco. The products resemble computer flash drives. They can be recharged in USB ports and used without being noticed, including in school bathrooms and even in classrooms.

According to the new CDC data, about 8 percent of high schoolers and 2 percent of middle schoolers said they had recently smoked cigarettes in 2018. Those findings were about the same as similar surveys in 2016, and 2017.

**Frequency Of Vaping Increasing**

The study also found that about 2 in 5 high school students who used a vaping or tobacco product also used more than one kind. The most common combination was e-cigarettes and cigarettes. Also, about 28 percent of high school e-cigarette users said they vaped 20 or more days in the previous month. The jump is a 40 percent increase from the previous year.

Smoking, the nation's leading cause of preventable illness, is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths each year. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration bans the sale of e-cigarettes and tobacco products to those under 18.

E-cigarettes are generally considered better than cigarettes for adults who are already addicted to nicotine. However, health officials have worried for years that electronic cigarettes could lead kids to switch to smoking traditional cigarettes.

"I think the writing is on the wall," said Megan Roberts, an Ohio State University researcher. Evidence increasingly suggests that e-cigarettes are becoming a gateway to regular cigarettes.

**Researchers Not Positive About Vaping's Role**

Health researchers, though, are split in their opinions about e-cigarettes. Some had linked e-cigarettes to an unusually large drop in teen smoking a few years ago. They say it is not clear to what extent the decline in smoking has stalled or to what degree vaping is to blame.

Cigarette smoking is still declining in some states. Another large survey found that smoking has continued to drop among 12th graders, though not in younger school kids.

"It's not clear yet what's going on and it's best to not jump to any conclusions," said David Levy. He is a Georgetown University researcher.

In a statement, a Juul spokeswoman said the company has taken steps to prevent children from using its products. The company supports prohibiting sales of e-cigarettes to anyone under 21.