

PENNSYLVANIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT TOBACCO USE FACTSHEET 2024

BACKGROUND

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death in the United States, and is a public health concern among youth, as initiation of tobacco use may continue into adulthood.¹ This factsheet describes tobacco use among high school students in Pennsylvania (PA) based on the 2021 PA Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey data.²

WHO DOES THE ISSUE IMPACT?

One out of five PA high school students used tobacco products, including electronic vapor products (EVPs) (19.2%), cigarettes (4.2%), cigars (3.6%), and smokeless tobacco products (3.4%). [Figure 1]. The prevalence of EVPs use (vaping) was 4.5 times the cigarette smoking prevalence in PA high school students.

For cigarette smoking, the prevalence was 5.4% among male high school students and 3.0% among female high school students. By race and ethnicity, the prevalence was 5.4% among non-Hispanic (NH) Whites, 2.6% among Hispanics/Latinos, and 0.6% among NH Blacks [Figure 2]. Smoking prevalence by grade was highest in 12th graders (6.9%) and lowest in 9th graders (0.9%) [Figure 3].

Contrary to cigarette smoking prevalence, vaping prevalence was higher among female than among male high school students (22.6% vs 16.2%). NH Whites had the highest vaping prevalence (21%), followed by Hispanics/Latinos (19.9%), NH Blacks (12%), and NH Asians (4%) [Figure 2]. Vaping was higher among the upper grade levels, with one-third of 12th graders reporting use of EVPs in 2021 [Figure 3]. In 2021, 40.3% of high school students reported trying vaping at least once in their lifetime and 11.2% of high school students reported purchasing EVPs themselves at retail outlets.

Figure 1. Youth Tobacco Use (%) by Tobacco Product Type, PA YRBSS, 2021

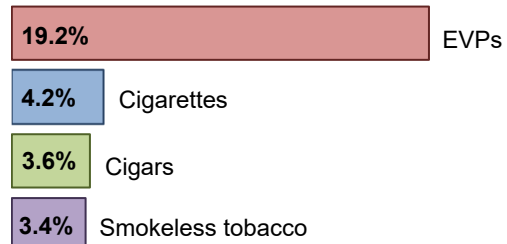


Figure 2. Smoking vs Vaping Prevalence by Race/Ethnicity, PA YRBSS, 2021

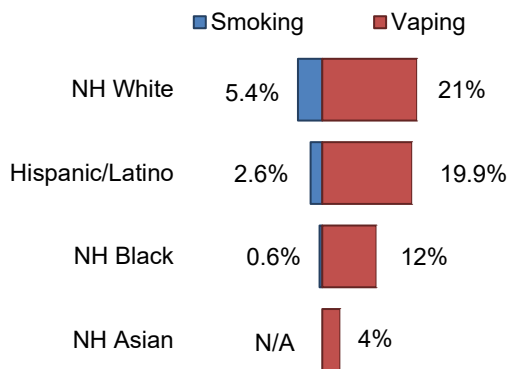
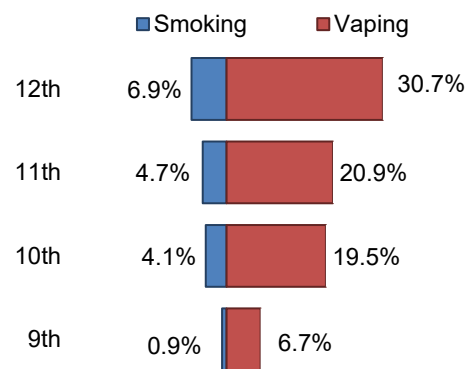


Figure 3. Smoking vs Vaping Prevalence by Grade Level, PA YRBSS, 2021



Limitations exist in the presented data. The data is restricted to only youth attending high school. Homeschooled or youth out of school due to homelessness, incarceration, or drop-out are not included. Youth in some of those situations may have increased health risk behaviors. Additionally, surveyed high school students may under or overreport health risk behaviors leading to unreliable results. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected survey participation and health risk behaviors.

1. CDC. Office on Smoking and Health. 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/about/osh/index.htm>

2. CDC. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The PA Department of Health Division of Tobacco Prevention and Control (DTPC) collaborates with community partners and stakeholders to implement a strategic plan for reducing tobacco-associated morbidity and mortality in the Commonwealth.³ The strategic plan aligns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs* and includes the following goals:⁴

- Prevent initiation of all tobacco product use among youth and young adults
- Promote quitting among adults and youth
- Eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke
- Advance health equity by identifying and eliminating commercial tobacco product-related inequalities and disparities

DTPC leads multiple statewide and regional youth initiatives including the Tobacco Resistance Unit (TRU). TRU educates youth on the dangers of tobacco use, provides resources for cessation, and advocates for policies and programs to prevent youth initiation of tobacco products. DTPC enforces tobacco retailer laws in the Commonwealth to prevent tobacco sales to minors.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Do not initiate tobacco use by smoking, vaping, or using smokeless tobacco products
- If currently using tobacco products, seek assistance with quitting through counseling services, nicotine replacement therapy, and professional guidance
- Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke
- Educate youth on the dangers of tobacco use

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

- PA Department of Health Division of Tobacco Prevention and Control:
<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/tobacco/pages/tobacco.aspx>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Office on Smoking and Health:
<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/index.htm>
- PA Quitline's My Life, My Quit Program:
<https://pa.mylifemyquit.org/>

3. PA DOH DTPC. *Strategic Plan 2023-2027*. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Programs/Tobacco/PA%20Tobacco%20Strategic%20Plan%202023-2027.pdf>

4. CDC. *Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs*. 2014. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/stateandcommunity/guides/pdfs/2014/comprehensive.pdf>