

E-Cigarette Use Rising Among Youth, Study Says Federal Report Calls the Trend Troubling

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A government study indicates a sharp rise in the use of electronic cigarettes by adolescents, a trend that public-health authorities called troubling.

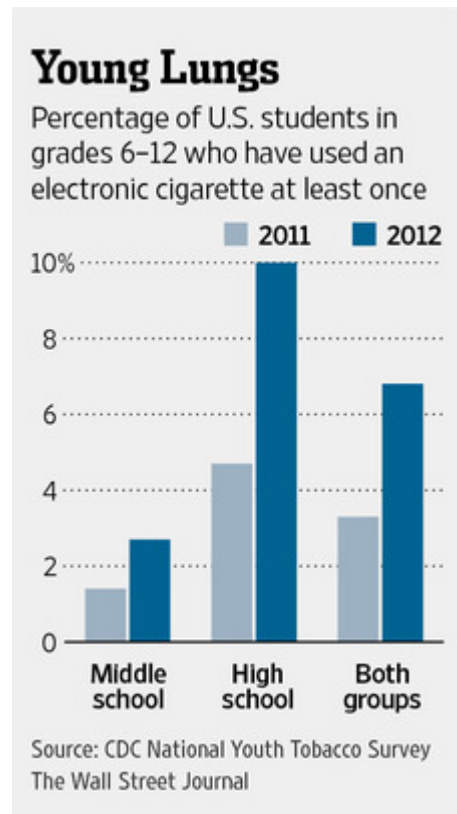
The finding could influence how the Food and Drug Administration regulates the battery-powered devices, which turn nicotine-laced liquid into vapor and represent a small but fast-growing alternative to traditional cigarettes. The FDA hopes to propose regulations for e-cigarettes by next month.



A new study showing a sharp rise in the use of electronic cigarettes among young people could influence how the battery-powered devices are regulated. *Getty Images*



Electronic cigarettes turn nicotine-laced liquid vapor. Their rising use by youth worries health experts.
Getty Images



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday that the percentage of high-school students who have tried an e-cigarette rose to 10% in 2012 from 4.7% in 2011. The rate among middle-school students rose to 2.7% from 1.4%. The findings come from the National Youth Tobacco Survey, a questionnaire given annually to roughly 20,000 students.

More than two dozen states have moved since 2010 to ban the sale of e-cigarettes to minors amid an absence of federal oversight. Federal rules already prohibit the sale of traditional tobacco products such as regular cigarettes to anyone under 18.

Though e-cigarettes still deliver highly addictive nicotine, most researchers say they are far less harmful than traditional cigarettes, which release numerous toxins through combustion. E-cigarette advocates say the devices, whose U.S. sales could top \$1 billion this year, help smokers quit traditional ones. Nearly one in five U.S. adults still smoke traditional cigarettes, which are blamed for over 400,000 deaths a year.

But many anti-tobacco groups say e-cigarettes could be a new gateway to traditional smokes. Unlike highly regulated traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes are sold on the Internet and advertised on television. They also come in a variety of flavors, ranging from strawberry to chocolate, while traditional cigarettes may be sold only with tobacco and menthol flavoring.

Tim McAfee, director of the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health, termed the rising use of e-cigarettes by adolescents "alarming" and said e-cigarette ads are "glamorizing" tobacco products for a new generation.

"This is heading in exactly the wrong direction," Dr. McAfee said in an interview, adding that regulators also should weigh flavor bans in addition to prohibiting sales to minors.

Mitch Zeller, director of the FDA's Center for Tobacco Products, said in a statement the data are "cause for great concern" and "reinforce" the agency's plans to regulate novel tobacco products such as e-cigarettes. He added that the long-term effects of e-cigarettes still aren't understood.

The CDC also reported that the number of high-school students who said they had used e-cigarettes in the 30 days prior to the questionnaire rose to 2.8% in 2012 from 1.5% in 2011. Among middle-school students, it rose to 1.1% from 0.6%.

One in five middle-school students who reported trying e-cigarettes said they had never tried traditional cigarettes.

The National Association of Tobacco Outlets, which represents 28,000 stores, backs age limits and says it is unaware any of its members sell e-cigarettes to minors. Many e-cigarette companies say they support bans on selling to minors and that most of their customers are adults who have switched from traditional cigarettes.

"We look forward to a regulatory framework for e-cigarettes that restricts youth access while at the same time doesn't stifle what may be the most significant harm-reduction opportunity that has ever

been made available to smokers," said Murray Kessler, chief executive of Lorillard Inc., a large cigarette maker that owns blu, a top-selling e-cigarette brand.

Craig Weiss, chief executive of NJOY Inc., another major e-cigarette maker, said there still is no evidence that e-cigarettes lead teenagers toward traditional cigarettes. He added that NJOY, like Lorillard, requires retailers to verify customers aren't minors.

E-cigarettes have made smaller inroads among youth than traditional cigarettes, marijuana or alcohol. On an average day in 2010-2011, 881,684 U.S. teenagers aged 12 to 17 smoked cigarettes, 646,707 smoked marijuana and 457,672 drank alcohol, according to a report last month by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

But the rise of e-cigarettes, which began surfacing in the U.S. about five years ago, coincides with a decline in traditional cigarettes. Traditional cigarette use in 2011 stood at 4.3% and 15.8% among middle- and high-school students, respectively, over the previous 30 days. That was down from 10.7% and 27.9%, respectively, in 2000, according to the CDC.

E-cigarettes overall still represent only about 1% of the roughly \$100 billion U.S. tobacco market.

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