

E-Cigarettes use in Adolescents across Bath and North East Somerset and Swindon

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My Voice Matters is ensuring the voice of people with diverse lived experiences and backgrounds are heard.

We are proud to be able to give the opportunity for seldom heard voices to be heard by providers and wider organisations in their own words.

This report was written by Annabel Rickards an A Level student.

Summary

This research highlights the concerning rise in vaping among adolescents in Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) and Swindon, driven by curiosity, stress, peer pressure, normalisation of vaping and ease of access.

With 33% of surveyed youths having used an e-cigarette at least once and with 26.4% vaping regularly or more often, this is higher than the national average. Health risks, including addiction and dangerous side effects, are significant.

Introduction

This survey was undertaken in B&NES and Swindon and explores the prevalence and factors that can influence young people regarding vaping.

This is supplemented by a questionnaire for students in Swindon between 16 and 19 and anecdotes from pupils aged 10 to 18 in Swindon and pupils aged 16 to 18 in Bath.

Vaping, or the use of e-cigarettes has become increasingly prevalent among adolescents. Originally marketed as a safer alternative to smoking, vaping has quickly gained popularity in the 15 years since vapes were introduced to the UK market, especially among children and adolescents.

This research is an exploration of the proportion of young children and adolescents that are vaping in B&NES and Swindon. By identifying the proportion of the population, direct targets and goals can be set in order to attempt to reduce usage.

The demographic

This survey gathered the views of 125 people from Swindon and Bath, 88.8% of respondents were adolescents between the ages of 15-19 and with 52% being 17 or 18 years old. 91% of participants were in some form of education with 84% of the respondents being sixth form students or college students.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	preteen		1.60%	2
2	13/14		0.80%	1
3	15/16		18.40%	23
4	17/18		52.00%	65
5	18/19		18.40%	23
6	19/20		1.60%	2
7	21/22		0.00%	0
8	Over 22		7.20%	9

The majority, 82.4%, of the participants are white which makes the demographic from the survey more racially diverse than Bath and Swindon, where 92.2% and 88.8% of the city population are white, respectively.

51.2% of people who responded were women compared to 43.2% who were men. The remaining 2% being non binary, and 4% not answering the question.

B&NES and Swindon survey findings:

This survey found that 33% of respondents have used an e-cigarette, with 26.4% of adolescents vaping 'occasionally' or more often.

This level of vaping is consistent with another survey that was undertaken by Swindon Borough Council, answered by students aged 16-19 in Swindon, where 36% of participants confirmed they vape. A student agreed, stating:








"It feels like half of Year ten and eleven are vaping."

Both of these figures are an increase to the B&NES 'School Related Health Survey' in 2022, in which 27% of Year 8 & 10 pupils responded they have used an e-cigarette at least once.

The percentage of people who have used an e-cigarettes is also 11.5% higher than the United Kingdom’s average in 2023, according to ASH’s (Action on Smoking and Health) National Survey, where 20.5% of children have used an e-cigarette. This figure has grown in the previous years from 16% in 2022.

Moreover, the percentage of adolescents who vape at least weekly is higher in this survey with 12% of adolescents using an e-cigarettes weekly, compared to ASH’s national figure of 7.6%. This is also an increase from B&NES’s “School Related Health Survey” where 10% of year 10 pupils reported they regularly (once a week or more) use e-cigarettes.

The survey found that those who currently vape have been vaping for a varying amount of time, with 22% of children vaping for less than six months, 20% between one and two years and 17% had vaped over two years.

Answer Choices			Response Percent
1	Less than 6 months		21.95%
2	6 months to 1 year		9.76%
3	1 to 2 years		19.51%
4	More than 2 years		17.07%
5	Less than 6 months		0.00%
6	6 months to 1 year		4.88%
7	1 to 2 years		2.44%
8	More than 2 years		17.07%

Factors that influence e-cigarette use

Whilst 70% of respondents claim the reason that they tried vaping was curiosity, there are some other common factors:

Age





The survey found that the majority (51.22%) first used an e-cigarettes at the age of 15 or 16, with 85.4% beginning between the ages of 13 to 16.

This could be due to an increase in stress during these years, this is supported by a survey of 1000 people, conducted by Truth Initiative in 2021. This shows that an overwhelming majority of young people, 81% of the surveyed people started vaping to decrease stress, anxiety, or depression.

This figure differs from the B&NES focused “School Health-related Behavior Study” which found that the key ages are 16, 17 and particularly 18.

Normalisation and pressure

26.40% of the adolescents surveyed stated that they felt pressured to start vaping which 93.94% of the time came from friends or their family.



1	friends/family		93.94%
2	adverts online/on TV		0.00%
3	social media		9.09%
4	promotion/adverts in shops		6.06%
5	Other (please specify):		6.06%

97% of all participants who have, or still, vape had some or more friends vaping when they first started, this could lead to the normalisation of vaping which could impact young people’s decision to use e-cigarettes.

This is also substantiated by a study by ASH, where adolescents whose family smoke are four times more likely to smoke themselves than adolescents who live in non-smoking households.

Ease

The use of e-cigarettes in children and adolescents may be due to how easy it is to access as 46.34% of respondents buy e-cigarettes from a corner-shop and the majority, 56.1% do not get asked for ID when purchasing vapes.

Answer Choices		Response Percent
1	Yes	 56.10%
2	No	 46.34%

An adolescent stated that **“there are corner shops near school that sell them and everyone knows where to get them if they want”**.

This survey also found that around 60% of participants vapes are often also brought through friends and family. One respondent even mentioned that **“some children buy them and then sell them to other kids at my school”**.





Social Media and Marketing

There does not appear to be a significant correlation between social media and the increase in vaping according to this survey as only 2.4% of the total respondents had felt pressured to vape from social media and no respondents felt pressure from adverts online.







Moreover, a survey from ASH in 2022 shows that most e-cigarette promotion that young people had seen was in shops. However, online Tik Tok was stated as the most frequently cited source of online promotion (45%) followed by Instagram (31%).

Health Effects of vaping

The NHS states that vaping is “substantially less harmful than smoking” yet only 42.4% of people believe it’s a safer alternative to cigarettes whilst 19.20% state that they are “unsure” whether vaping is a safer alternative to smoking cigarettes. 36% of respondents from the survey believe that it is not a safer alternative to smoking cigarettes.

1	Yes		42.40%
2	No		36.00%
3	Unsure		19.20%
4	Other (please specify):		4.80%

The majority at 54.5% believe health risks associated with vaping are high, and 20% believe that they are moderate.

Answer Choices			Response Percent
1	Very low		0.80%
2	Low		3.20%
3	Moderate		20.00%
4	High		54.40%
5	Very high		19.20%
6	Other (please specify):		2.40%

27% of the survey's participants believe that they are addicted to nicotine and exposure to nicotine in adolescence has also been associated with a negative impact on brain development.

Moreover, the use of e-cigarettes could be contributing to more young people beginning to smoke cigarettes. 73% of adolescents began smoking only after they had vaped and according to the survey, 21% of adolescents believe that their decision to start smoking was directly influenced by the vaping habits.

50% of respondents who vape have experienced side effects from e-cigarette use, with 24% experiencing a dry mouth or throat and 24% experiencing shortness of breath.

One student stated that their peer has "popcorn lungs" from e-cigarette use and "can't go into school".

Adolescents' experiences surrounding vaping:

One student said that "on the bus to secondary school there are older children vaping at the back of bus and no one dares to challenge them. It is awful".

Another child stated that, "there are corner shops that sell vapes to my friends, it is an open secret".

Regarding their schools' response to vaping, one student said, "it is a huge issue that schools do not talk about, all we get is vaping is bad, we need more information".

Other students agreed that "schools don't give info" and stated that "people won't listen if they did".

A student said that the anti-vaping posters are torn down the next day by other pupils.

Information from schools surrounding vaping is important; 40% of adolescents have reported that they get their news regarding vaping from their school.

Additionally, adolescents have stated that:



- “Vaping is more addictive than cigarettes because of the flavours’
- ‘People go straight to vaping they start before they are in college so there’s no point in having info at college.’
- ‘Its fun and helps people stop smoking, wouldn’t be fair to people if they were banned’
- ‘Don’t want to feel left out even though I know the risk.’
- ‘On the bus to secondary school there are older children vaping at the back of bus and no one dares to challenge them, it is awful’
- ‘There is a vaping cubicle in the girls’ toilets that the teachers do not know about, they all crowd in there and vape, it is ridiculous’
- ‘There are corner shops near school that sell them and everyone knows where to get them if they want’
- ‘I am sure some children buy them and then sell them to other kids at my school’
- ‘We do not hear about vaping at Primary School and no one does it, when you get to Secondary school it is everywhere’
- ‘You often see other school children vaping when you walk home from school’
- ‘It is a huge issue that schools do not talk about, all we get is vaping is bad, we need more information’
- ‘School put up anti vaping posters in the toilets and next break when you go in, they have been torn down’
- ‘I hate vaping there is so much peer pressure to do it’
- ‘I don’t get it, why do people feel they are better than me because they vape’



The government's actions to reduce smoking and vaping

Currently, the UK legislation means that anyone under the age of 18 cannot buy cigarettes or any vaping equipment from a store (this includes e-liquids, vape kits, disposable vapes, and vape juice without nicotine.)

The government aims to prevent anyone born after 1st January 2009 from smoking by preventing the sale of tobacco products to them.

The government is also aiming to ban disposable vapes, restrict vape flavors and their packaging in an attempt to make them less appealing to children.

Moreover, to crack down on underage sales, the government will bring in new fines for shops in England and Wales that sell vapes to those who are underage.

This legalisation was introduced relatively recently in January 2024, and have since been revived by the Labour government in July 2024 yet there is no indication of when these laws will come into play.

This would aim to decrease the amount of adolescents who vape as various "People vape because of the splashy colours and flavours" and that vaping "is marketed to kids by colours" and they "target under 18s by the colours and designs."

B&NES

Wellbeing Services in B&NES currently offer free local support to smokers aged 12 years and over, including individual consultations. This service does not appear to do the same for those who want to quit vaping.

Recommendations:

Introduce regulation

The aforementioned legislation being introduced by the government to address these issues should decrease the volume of young people vaping however, it is imperative that these laws should be implemented soon in order to prevent additional adolescents and children from beginning to vape.

[E-Cigarettes use in adolescents across Bath and North East Somerset and Swindon](#)

In B&NES and Swindon, advocating for these laws to be implemented quickly and enforcement of this legalisation would be beneficial.

Enhancing public education imperative

- Launch localised public education campaigns in B&NES and Swindon, focusing on the risks of vaping, targeting young people whilst promoting awareness to the newly available cessation support services.
- Provide local health care providers with resources and training on how to discuss vaping and it's risks with younger patients, as well as guiding them on appropriate referral options for further support.
- To promote change locally, integrated campaigns to increase public awareness and address the links between vaping and mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and depression, as well as localised public education campaigns.
- Alongside this, a focus on improving and implementing mental health services to provide support to those struggling with their mental health would help as poor mental health increases the likelihood of young person deciding to vape.

Improving cessation support and resources

- In order to address adolescents who already vape, cessation support should be introduced, targeted towards young people.
- A collaborative, nonjudgmental effort between government, schools, and health services is essential to help those who are already addicted to nicotine.
- Increasing the availability of nicotine replacement therapy, introducing quit-lines and counseling and other age-appropriate aids for adolescents would provide essential support for young people who want to quit vaping.

Alongside this, a focus on improving and implementing mental health services to provide support to those struggling with their mental health would help as poor mental health can increase the likelihood of young person deciding to vape.

Targeting vulnerable populations

Focus on high-risk groups and target and tailor these interventions to them, customising outreach and support programs for those who are more vulnerable.

By addressing the unique challenges that these groups face, interventions can be more effective and beneficial.

This includes those who are from low-income backgrounds, individuals with mental health issues and other communities with a higher amount of adolescents who vape.

Next Steps

The report will be shared with the local Colleges, the Public Health Teams and the BSW Integrated Care Board and Health and Wellbeing Boards for B&NES and Swindon for them to understand what young people are saying.

The report will also be placed on our Healthwatch Websites and shared with Healthwatch England.

Resources

<https://thehub.bathnes.gov.uk/Page/31295>

[Vaping myths and the facts - Better Health - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/vaping-myths-and-the-facts)

<https://teen.smokefree.gov/quit-vaping/how-to-quit-vaping>

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://oneyousurrey.org.uk/smoking/how-to-quit-vaping-2/&ved=2ahUKEwj_jpby9rCHAxW3BtsEHWcXA8MQFnoECBUQAw&usg=AOvVaw3s8I5GxDvgID8OEJUNBzPi





https://www.google.com/search?q=stop+vaping+uk&client=safari&sca_esv=ab2585b2b0b24f44&sca_upv=1&hl=en&sxsrf=ADLYWIKu-u3soMGpGBIW-kYbujzVXmofzQ:1721317368110&ei=-DeZZv-yBreN7NYP566MmAw&start=30&sa=N&sstk=Aagrsug4ofg3JZPydGsMRp8mIhZAORBckqLa7lxybcVZ0e2zDuEnh7zHUFkGpdyGD6_q9MBEpO4LjUtoatefAK2QTLt8TnRofaXUiA&ved=2ahUKEwj_jpby9rCHAxW3BtsEHWcXA8MQ8tMDegQIDBAI

Appendices

Demographic Data

23. Please select your ethnicity				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Arab		0.79%	1
3	Asian/Asian British: Chinese		3.97%	5
4	Asian/Asian British: Indian		1.59%	2
10	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White		1.59%	2
11	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White		2.38%	3
12	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White		0.79%	1
13	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic group background		0.79%	1
14	White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh		69.84%	88
15	White: Irish		1.59%	2
18	White: Any other White background		12.70%	16
19	Prefer not to say		3.97%	5
20	Other (please specify):		0.00%	0
			answered	126
			skipped	17

24. Please tell us your gender

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Woman		51.59%	65
2	Man		42.86%	54
3	Non-binary		1.59%	2
4	Prefer not to say		3.97%	5
5	Prefer to self describe:		0.00%	0
			answered	126
			skipped	17

Questionnaire: Vaping – What are your views?

1.

Thank you for answering the questions in this survey.

The purpose of this research is to better understand vaping practices and attitudes in young people.

It can be completed by a parent/carer on behalf of the young person if required

Your participation in this survey is anonymous.

None of the data gathered through the survey will be used to identify you, ensuring your privacy and confidentiality are maintained. All data collected will be used solely for research purposes.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

1. Do you believe that vaping is a safer alternative to smoking traditional cigarettes?

Yes

No

Unsure

Other (please specify):

2. Have you ever felt pressured to start vaping?

Yes

No

Other (please specify):

2.

3. If yes, where from?

friends/family

adverts online/on TV

social media

promotion/adverts in shops

Other (please specify):

3.

4. How serious do you think are the health risks associated with vaping?

Very low

Low

Moderate

High

Very high

Other (please specify):

5. How do you stay informed about vaping-related news and regulations?

News websites

Social media

- Friends/family
- School
- I don't stay informed.
- Other (please specify):

4.

6. What is your current age?

- preteen
- 13/14
- 15/16
- 17/18
- 18/19
- 19/20
- 21/22
- Over 22

7. Do you currently vape?

- yes, regularly
- yes, occasionally
- no, I have quit
- no, never
- Other (please specify):

5.

8. If you vape (or used to) how long have you been vaping?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years

- More than 2 years
- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- More than 2 years
- I do not Vape

9. What age were you when you began vaping?

- pre-teen
- 13/14
- 15/16
- 17/18
- over 18
- N/A

10. How often do you vape?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never
- Other (please specify):

11. Where do you get your Vapes from?

- Corner Shop
- Supermarket
- Online
- Friends/family
- Other (please specify):

12. Do you get asked for ID when you purchase Vapes?

Yes

No

13. Why did you start vaping? (Select all that apply)

To quit smoking

Curiosity, just to try

Flavour variety

Friend/family use(d) them

Other (please specify):

14. How many of your peers vaped when you first vaped?

None

Some of them

Most of them

All of them

15. What type of vaping device do you primarily use?

Disposable vapes (eg: elf bars, lost mars)

Reusable vape pens.

Vape mods.

Other (please specify):

16. If you vape, have you experienced any of the following symptoms? Select all that apply.

persistent cough

dry mouth/throat

shortness of breath

headaches

nausea

none of the above

Other (please specify):

17. Usually, do your vapes contain nicotine?

- Yes
- No, my vapes are usually non-nicotine
- Do not Know
- Other (please specify):

18. Do you think you are addicted to nicotine?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Other (please specify):

6.

19. Have you smoked a cigarette in the past?

- Yes, regularly
- occasionally
- never
- Tried it once
- Other (please specify):

7.

20. If Yes - do you think that vaping influenced your decision to smoke cigarettes?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

21. If you had smoked a cigarette in the past, had you smoked a cigarette before you started vaping?

Yes

No

8.

22. Anything else that you would like to share about your experiences of vaping?

23. Please select your ethnicity

Arab

Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi

Asian/Asian British: Chinese

Asian/Asian British: Indian

Asian/Asian British: Pakistani

Asian/Asian British: Any other Asian/Asian British background

Black/Black British: African

Black/Black British: Caribbean

Black/Black British: Any other Black/Black British background

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic group background

White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh

White: Irish

White: Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller

White: Roma

White: Any other White background

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify):

24. Please tell us your gender

Woman

Man

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self describe:

25. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

Student at Secondary School

Student at Sixth Form/College

Student at University

Working full time (employed or self employed)

Working part time (employed or self employed)

Unemployed and looking for work

Unable to work due to health issues or a disability

Retired

Stay at home parent

Caring for someone with long term health conditions or a disability

Doing unpaid work/volunteering

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify):



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