

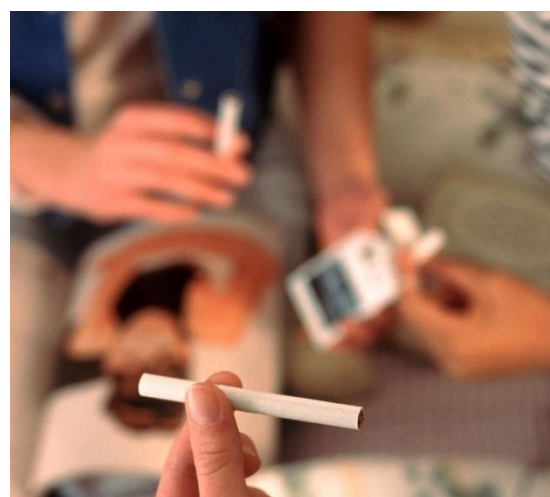
Youth Policy Survey: Cigarette and E-Cigarette Results Briefing

Topline Summary

This survey shows that many young people have their first cigarette or e-cigarette before 18 and frequently encounter related posts on social media, despite regulations. However, many young people don't think it's OK to see such content and believe more should be done by companies and the government to restrict underage exposure to cigarette and e-cigarette content on social media.

Introduction

Cancer cases in the UK are thought to rise by a third by 2040¹, but four in ten cancers can be prevented. Smoking, overweight and obesity, and alcohol all increase cancer risk². E-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking and are used to help people quit, but their long-term effects aren't known³ and there are concerns about their increased uptake by young people⁴.



Why cigarettes matter

Smoking is the biggest cause of cancer and premature death in the UK, and it is estimated that tobacco causes around 75,800 deaths each year in the UK⁵. If current trends continue, smoking could cause around one million cancer cases in the UK between now and 2040⁶.

Why e-cigarettes matter

E-cigarettes often contain nicotine, which is a very addictive substance, so an increase in the use of e-cigarettes in people who have never smoked and young people under 18 is of concern.

Survey aims

We have developed a new survey to explore in detail how and to what extent young people are exposed to, and interact with, marketing related to tobacco, e-cigarettes, high fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) food/drink, and alcohol on social media apps.

The survey set out to investigate:

- How young people engage with, and report exposure to, marketing on social media for tobacco, e-cigarettes, HFSS products and alcohol.
- Young people's intentions to use these products, and how this might relate to their social media use.
- If young people are okay with the marketing of these products on social media and what they think about potential policy options.

Methods



The survey collected responses from 4049 young people aged 11-21-years-old across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. *



This brief will focus on the results relating to cigarettes and e-cigarettes, split into two sections.

Cigarettes

1. Smoking habits
2. Cigarettes on social media

E-Cigarettes

1. Vaping habits
2. E-Cigarettes on social media
3. E-Cigarette policies

Cigarettes

1. Smoking habits

Cigarette use

One fifth of our survey respondents (20%) have smoked a cigarette at least once in their life, including experimental use.

Of those who have smoked before, 24% are still currently smoking (more than once a month). This is 5% of the overall sample in our survey.

Looking at age, most respondents who had smoked before (70%) had their first cigarette before 18, and one fifth (21%) were 13 or younger.

Only 1% of young people who have never smoked before think they probably or definitely will have a cigarette in the next year, and only 2% would probably or definitely have a cigarette if their friend offered it to them.

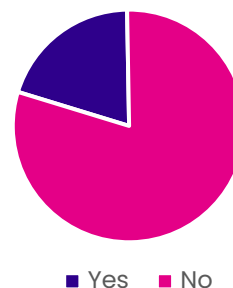
Why do young people buy cigarettes?

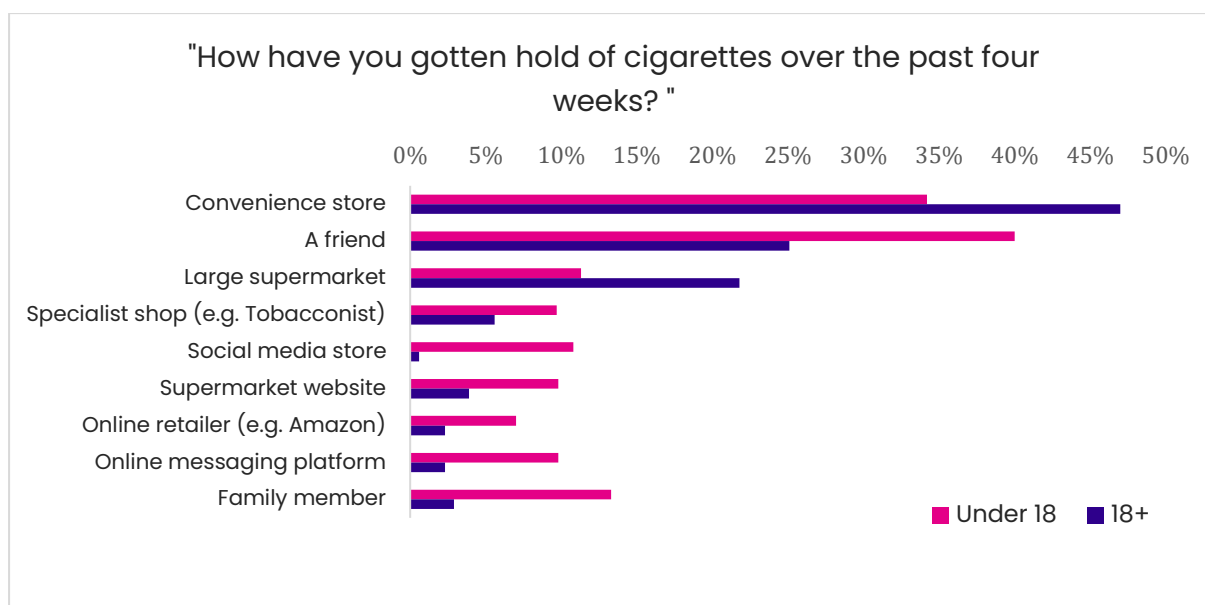
When buying cigarettes, price is influential: over half (58%) of respondents said the price of the product was an important factor. Price is followed by product quality (45%), and brand appeal (30%). Just under one fifth (19%) of young people thought seeing cigarettes posted on social media was an important factor when deciding what cigarettes to buy.

Where do young people buy cigarettes?

Notably, the top two sources for cigarettes are shared across those under and over 18, albeit in reversed order: for those under 18, this is mostly through their friends (40%), shortly followed by convenience stores and off-licenses (34%), whereas for those 18 and over, this is mostly through convenience stores and off-licenses (47%), followed by friends (25%).

"Have you ever used or tried a cigarette before?"





Smoking, vaping, and drinking

Of those who have ever smoked, 84% have also vaped at least once before, and 43% are current vapers.

Of those who have never smoked before, 14% have vaped at least once before and 3% are current vapers.

Of those who have ever smoked, 88% have drunk an alcoholic beverage at least once before, compared to 38% of those who have never smoked.

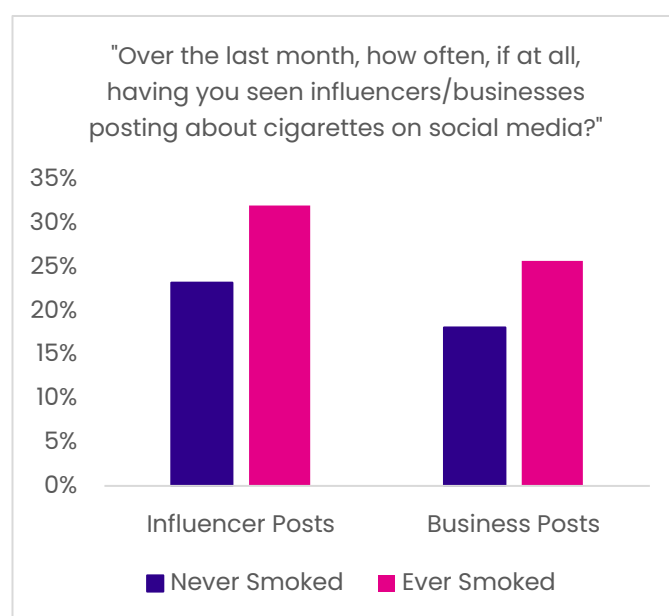
2. Cigarettes on social media

Posts by businesses and influencers

A quarter (25%) of all young people in our survey reported seeing an influencer post about cigarettes on social media in the last month.

One fifth (20%) of young people stated they saw a business posting about cigarettes on social media in the last month.

More people who have smoked before reported seeing posts by both businesses and influencers compared to people who have never smoked.



Engagement with social media posts

Of those who saw influencer and business posts about cigarettes in the last month, 40% actively engaged in at least one way. This includes liking, commenting, and sharing on the post.

People who have smoked before were more likely to interact with cigarette posts by businesses and influencers (63%) than those who have never smoked before (30%).

Conclusion

This survey shows that one fifth of young people have smoked before, although the majority are not currently smoking. Most young people had their first cigarette before 18. Despite strong cigarette advertising regulations, many young people reported seeing posts about cigarettes from businesses and influencers online, and of those who did, many interacted with them in some way. Young people who smoked saw more posts than those who didn't and interacted more with them, too.

E-Cigarettes

1. Vaping habits

E-cigarette use

Over a quarter of our survey respondents (28%) have vaped at least once in their life, including experimental use.

Of those who have vaped before, 38% are still currently vaping (more than once a month). This is 11% of our overall survey sample.

Looking at age, we can see that the majority of respondents (71%) had their first e-cigarette before 18, and over one fifth (22%) were 13 or younger.

Most respondents who vape do so when with other people such as friends (45%), or vape the same amount when by themselves and with others (41%). Only 12% mostly vape when they are on their own.

Only 1% of young people who have never vaped before think they probably or definitely will vape in the next year, and only 2% would probably or definitely vape if their friend offered it to them.

Why do young people buy e-cigarettes?

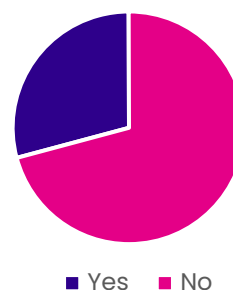
When buying e-cigarettes, price is influential: over half (55%) of respondents said it was an important factor, and 44% also agreed that price discounts were important. Price was closely followed by having new flavours and product types to try (47%), and product quality (47%). Just over one fifth (21%) of young people thought seeing e-cigarettes posted on social media was an important factor when deciding what e-cigarettes to buy.

Where do young people buy e-cigarettes?

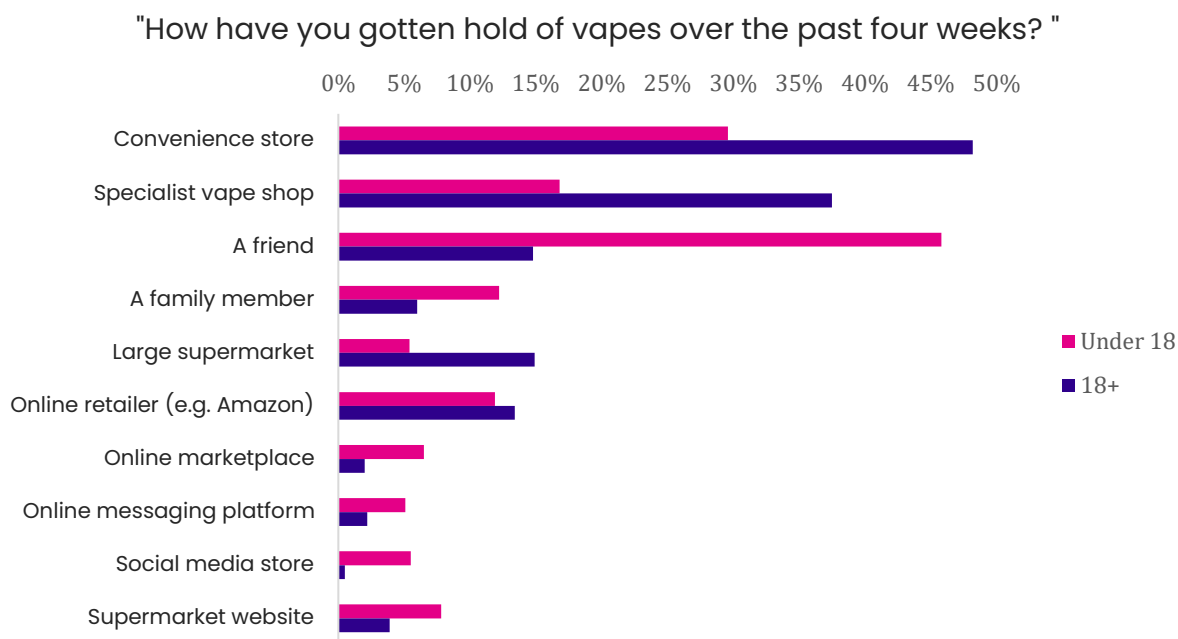
Age was a large factor when considering where young people got their e-cigarettes from.

Those under 18 mostly got theirs from friends (46%) and convenience stores or off-licenses (30%).

"Have you ever used or tried a vape before?"



Those 18 and over mostly got theirs from convenience stores or off-licenses (48%) or specialist shops like vape shops (38%).



Smoking, vaping, and drinking

Of those who have ever vaped, 59% have also smoked at least once before, and 16% are currently smoking.

Of those who have never vaped before, 4% have smoked at least once before and 0.4% are currently smoking.

Of those who have ever vaped, 81% have drunk an alcoholic beverage at least once before, compared to 35% of those who have never vaped.

2. E-cigarettes on social media

Posts by businesses and influencers

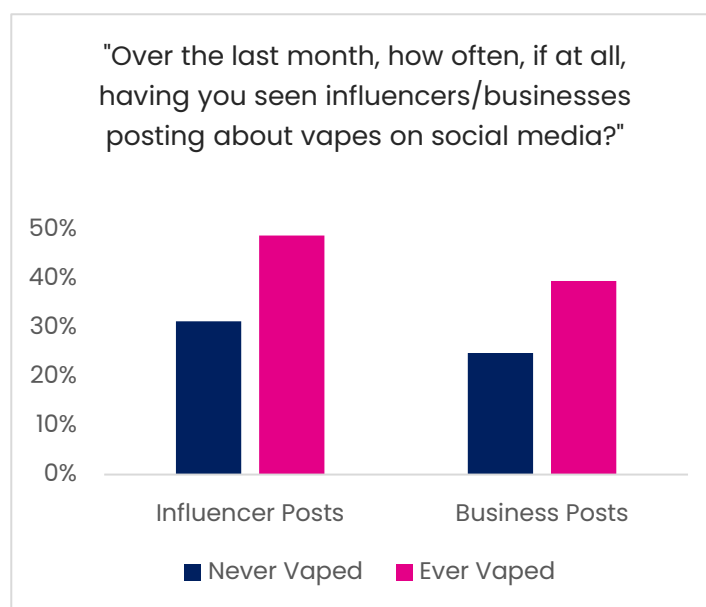
Over a quarter (29%) of young people stated they saw a business posting about vapes on social media in the last month, with little difference between under 18s (28%) and over 18s (31%).

Over a third (37%) of young people reported the same for influencer posts, with little difference between under 18s (35%) and over 18s (38%).

More people who have vaped before reported seeing posts by both businesses and influencers compared to people who have never vaped.

Mandatory messaging

On posts that are adverts for vapes, mandatory statements are required. Of respondents who saw businesses and influencers posting about e-cigarettes, these statements were only seen some of the time:



- 'Vapes are only for those aged 18 or over'
 - 25% reported never seeing this message for business posts.
 - 34% reported never seeing this message for influencer posts.
- 'Vapes are a tool to help people stop smoking'
 - 23% reported never seeing this message for business posts.
 - 30% reported never seeing this message for influencer posts.
- 'Vapes contain nicotine'
 - 22% reported never seeing this message for business posts.
 - 28% reported never seeing this message for influencer posts.
- Message stating the post was an advert
 - 15% reported never seeing this message for business posts.
 - 32% reported never seeing this message for influencer posts.

Engagement with social media posts

Of those who reported seeing influencer and business posts about e-cigarettes in the last month, 22% actively engaged in at least one way. This includes liking, commenting, and sharing on the post.

People who have vaped before interacted with more e-cigarette posts by businesses and influencers (35%) compared to those who have never vaped before (14%).

3. E-cigarette policies

Young people were presented with a range of statements and possible policies and were asked to rate how much they agreed with them.

Private accounts

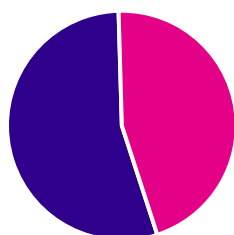
One policy option suggested that e-cigarette businesses should have their social media accounts set to private, so that people would have to follow them to see what they post. This would stop posts from businesses showing up in young people's algorithmic feeds, such as on Instagram or TikTok where posts appear that the app thinks you would like to see, not just from those you follow.

Many young people agreed with this approach: over two thirds (68%) agreed or strongly agreed on this idea compared to 11% who disagreed in some way. The remaining 21% said they didn't know/neither agreed nor disagreed.

Almost two thirds (63%) of all young people also agreed or strongly agreed that if accounts cannot be made private on an app, then businesses who make and sell e-cigarettes should not be allowed to have an account on that app. In comparison, 14% disagreed in some way.

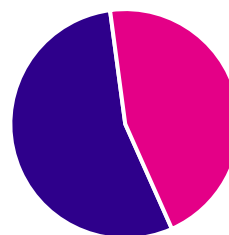
People who have never vaped were more likely to think that e-cigarette businesses should be regulated with private accounts than those who have vaped before.

Accounts should be private



■ Never vaped ■ Ever vaped

No private option, no account

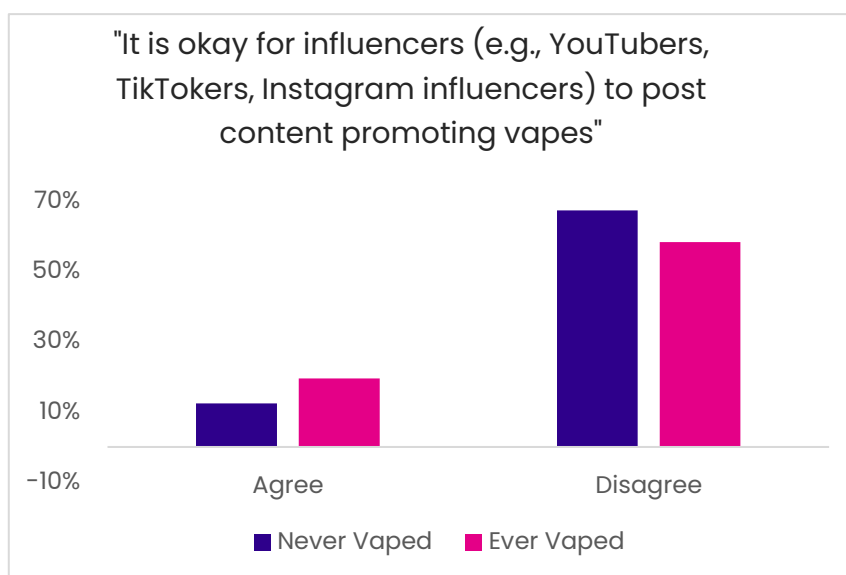


■ Never vaped ■ Ever vaped

Online promotion

In this section, young people were asked if they thought it was OK for influencers to promote e-cigarettes on social media. Nearly two thirds (64%) of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed, compared to 14% who thought it was fine.

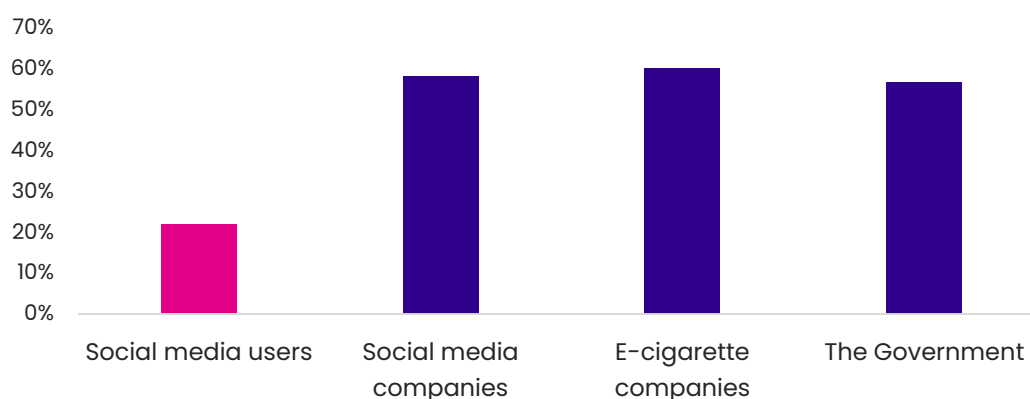
People who had never vaped were slightly more likely to say it wasn't OK for influencers to post e-cigarette content compared to those who have vaped before.



Responsibility

Most young people thought the responsibility to make sure businesses don't promote e-cigarettes to under 18s was someone else's – i.e. not their own. Over half believed it was the responsibility of the social media companies (58%), e-cigarette companies (60%), and the Government (56%). Just over a fifth (22%) of young people believed that social media users were responsible.

"Who do you think is responsible for making sure that businesses do not use social media to promote vapes to people under 18 years old?"



Conclusion

This survey shows that over a quarter of young people have tried e-cigarettes before, and 11% currently vape at least once a month. Many young people are seeing and interacting with posts about vapes on social media by businesses and influencers, but mandatory messaging such as nicotine content and age restrictions are often not seen. Most young people don't think it's OK for influencers to promote e-cigarettes and think that companies and the Government should be doing more to stop under 18s from seeing e-cigarettes on social media at all.

References

¹ Calculated by the Cancer Intelligence Team, Cancer Research UK. February 2023. Cancer incidence and mortality projections for UK and constituent nations, using data to 2018.

² Brown KF, Rumgay H, Dunlop C, Ryan M, Quartly F, Cox A, De as A, Elliss-Brookes L, Gavin A, Hounscome L, Huws D. The fraction of cancer attributable to modifiable risk factors in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom in 2015. *British journal of cancer*. 2018 Apr 17;118(8):1130–41.

³ Berry KM, Fetterman JL, Benjamin EJ, Bhatnagar A, Barrington-Trimis JL, Leventhal AM, Stokes A. Association of electronic cigarette use with subsequent initiate on of tobacco cigarettes in US youths. *JAMA network open*. 2019 Feb 1;2(2):e187794–.

⁴ Action on Smoking and Health. 2023. Use of e-cigarettes (vapes) among young people in Great Britain 2023. Accessed July 2023.

⁵ Global Burden of Disease results (2021) Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Available at: <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/> (Accessed: 04 July 2024).

⁶ Smith, J. (2024) England slips further off-track for Smokefree 2030 target, Cancer Research UK – Cancer News. Available at: <https://news.cancerresearchuk.org/2022/12/29/england-slips-further-off-track-for-smokefree-2030-target/> (Accessed: 04 July 2024).