

Introduction

The 2017 Connecticut School Health Survey (CSHS) is a comprehensive survey that consists of two components: the Youth Tobacco Component (YTC) and the Youth Behavior Component (YBC). This report covers data collected from the YTC. The YTC is known nationally as the Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS) and will be referred to as the YTS within this document.

Between March and June of 2017, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) conducted the CSHS in cooperation with The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Connecticut YTS is administered biennially. Prior to 2017, the Connecticut YTS was successfully completed in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015. YTS data are used by health and education officials to improve state programs that help prevent and control use of tobacco products among Connecticut's youth.

Selected Findings

Tobacco

Over one-third (34.4%) of Connecticut high school students report having ever tried some form of tobacco. This represents nearly 59,000 students. Rates of use ranged from 23.1% in grade 9 to 45.8% in grade 12. For high schools students overall, current use of tobacco is reported at 17.9%. And, the vast majority of youth are using flavored tobacco products.

E-Cigarettes/Vaping Devices

Although cigarette smoking has decreased significantly among Connecticut youth, the use of electronic cigarettes and vaping devices continues to increase at an alarming rate. Overall, current use among high school students is 14.7%, with usage increasing with age from 11.1% among those 15 years-old and younger to 20.8% among students 18 years-old and older. This is especially concerning because studies have shown that this type of nicotine use by teens increases their risk of also using combustible tobacco as youths and as young adults.[†]

E-cigarettes are especially tempting for young people because they are available in flavors like cotton candy, bubble gum, fruit, peanut butter cup and chocolate cake. These enticing candy-, fruit- and dessert-flavored products may also bolster the belief among teens that e-cigarettes are not harmful. Another concerning finding is that more than half of e-cigarette users had used their vaping devices for substances other than nicotine, such as marijuana, THC or hash oil, or THC wax.

The primary reason students gave for using e-cigarettes is a friend or family member uses them (41.6%), and nearly one-quarter used them because they are available in flavors. Users were also asked how they accessed these products during the past 30 days. The majority (59.3%) reported they obtained their e-cigarettes from a friend, while about 20% tried to buy them but were refused sale because they were under the age of 18.

[†]National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. Public Health Consequences of E-Cigarettes. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/24952 ; also Bold KW, Kong G, Camenga DR, et al. Trajectories of E-Cigarette and Conventional Cigarette Use Among Youth. *Pediatrics*. 2018;141(1):e20171832.

Introduction, Continued

Secondhand Smoke Exposure

During the seven days prior to the survey, more than 45% of students had breathed the smoke from someone who was smoking a tobacco product. This represents more than 77,000 students. More than 1 in 4 students (27.3%) report living with someone who uses tobacco, and nearly 20% are living with a cigarette smoker.

Cessation

During the past year, about 41% of the students who used any form of tobacco stopped using it for a day or longer because they were trying to quit for good. Among cigarette smokers, nearly 43% tried to quit for good.

Conclusions

Although the use of combustible cigarettes has dropped significantly, high school youth are vaping more and are still being exposed to tobacco messaging, advertising and secondhand smoke. Although some preliminary studies have indicated that Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (e-cigarettes) may be safer than combustible cigarettes, the Surgeon General has concluded that nicotine poses a danger to youth, and its use in any form by youth is unsafe.

Youth are generally unaware of the presence and level of nicotine in their e-cigarettes and can become addicted with only a few puffs. The vast majority of all adults began their tobacco use as teenagers. An estimated 95% of all tobacco users start before age 21.

Systems, Policies and Environmental changes have been encouraged by the CDC in order to reduce tobacco initiation and use, especially among youth. The following are evidence-based strategies that could be adopted in Connecticut to reduce the number of students who are initiating tobacco use from year to year:

- ◆ Increasing the legal age for the sale of all tobacco products to 21.
- ◆ Youth are especially sensitive to price (see page 96), so increasing the price of tobacco products, corresponding with the taxes on combustible cigarettes, could help to prevent youth from purchasing these products and would likely result in decreased initiation and use, especially of electronic vape products.
- ◆ Restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products.
- ◆ Passing additional smoke-free laws, especially for workplaces, schools and public places in order to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke.
- ◆ Restricting the use of tobacco products in movies.
- ◆ Restricting the advertising of all tobacco products. Although there are restrictions on combustible cigarettes, there are none on the electronic vape products, and 49.1% of high school students report being exposed to these types of ads.

This introduction highlights only a few areas covered on the Connecticut YTS. Considerably more information on tobacco product use, exposure to secondhand smoke, smoking cessation, minors' ability to purchase or obtain tobacco products, knowledge and attitudes about tobacco, and familiarity with tobacco media messages is presented in the following report.