



ASH Wales Youth Vaping Survey Published May 2024

ASH Wales have conducted a survey amongst secondary school pupils in Wales to explore their attitudes and experiences of vaping and smoking.

The survey, which was conducted between 20th September through to December 20th, 2023, explored perceptions, exposure, usage, product acquisition, influences and feelings around dependency and withdrawal.

In total **12,524** pupils from year 7 through to year 13 responded to the survey with substantial responses (n=100+) from 34 out of the 195 schools and colleges contacted, and 14 out of the 22 unitary authorities in Wales.

ASH Wales thanks Gareth R Davies, Institute of Clinical Science and Technology, for his expertise and assistance in compiling this report.

Executive Summary

Nearly a quarter of all children (**24%**) **year 7 to 11 have tried vaping** and **7%** report being regular **current vapers**. More than a third (**37%**) of current child **vapers**, year 7 to 11, also report being current **smokers**. Females rather than males were more likely to vape on a regular basis (**8% vs 6%**). Current vapers compared to never vapers were twice as likely to live with someone who vapes or smokes (**66% vs 32%**).

More than 9 out of 10 (92%) of all current vapers use a **vape that contains nicotine** and nearly half (**45%**) say they cannot go the whole school day without vaping. More than **4 out of 10 (42%)** of all pupils year 7 to 11 say vapes are easy to get hold of and over half (**57%**) perceive vaping as common among their year group.

More than half (55%) of all pupils that vape reported using vaping products that are highly likely to be illegal, unregulated products that contain over 600 puffs.

Vaping Prevalence

- Nearly a quarter (**24%**) of all children year 7 to 11 reported to have **ever vaped**, rising to **44%** of year 12 and 13s
- **7%** of children year 7 to 11 were current vapers, rising to **13%** of 15/16-year-olds (year 11)
- **26%** of all current vapers said they would like to stop vaping
- Current vaping was significantly higher among females than males across all year groups rising to **17%** of females in year 13 compared to **10%** of males

Smoking and Vaping Prevalence

- **3%** of children year 7 to 11 reported as being current smokers rising to **5%** of 15/16-year-olds (year 11)
- **37%** of current vapers year 7 to 11 also report being current smokers
- **22%** of current vapers year 7 to 11 reported to be never smokers

Environment

- Vaping was disproportionately viewed as common with over half of all pupils citing vaping as common (**57%**)
- Pupils who currently vape were twice as likely to live with a smoker or a vaper than pupils who had never vaped (**66% vs 32%**)

Product

- The vast majority of current vapers use a vape that contains nicotine (**92%**)
- Nearly a half (**45%**) of all current vapers say they cannot go the whole school day without vaping
- More than a quarter (**26%**) of all current vapers said they would like to stop vaping
- More than half of all pupils who currently vape (**55%**) reported to be using vapes which are highly likely to be illegal and contain over 600 puffs

Access

- More than **4 out of 10 (42%)** of all pupils year 7 to 11 say vapes are easy to get hold of rising through the year groups with (**62%**) of 15/16-year-olds reporting it easy or very easy to get hold of a vape
- Nearly half (**47%**) of all current vapers report having received their first vape from a friend
- Informal sources (friends, family and someone they know) account for **36%** of all reported purchases of vapes by current vapers, with retailers accounting for **26%** of reported purchases

Conclusion

The prevalence of youth vaping, both experimental and current is of considerable concern, with nearly a quarter of all year 7 to 11 having tried vaping. The majority of pupils deem products easy to get hold of and vaping is perceived as common among their year group.

The use of unregulated products, acquired through unregulated channels is a major concern and any actions to reduce youth vaping will need to include measures to address informal sources of vapes.

The vast majority of current vapers use nicotine-containing devices, with a significant proportion unable to abstain from vaping throughout the school day. Moreover, a notable number of current vapers express a desire to quit, indicating potential dependence issues.

The influence of social environments and other high-risk behaviours should also be a key consideration within policies and actions to address youth vaping. Pupils that vape are more likely to smoke themselves and to live with someone that smokes or vapes than pupils that don't vape.

There is a clear need for a public communications campaign to highlight the issues of using unregulated products and to reinforce messaging on vapes as an effective smoking cessation tool rather than a recreational activity.

In conclusion, this study highlights the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address youth vaping. Strategies should encompass targeted education campaigns, increased product knowledge, stricter regulations and support to help young people quit vaping.

Overview

In response to rising concerns around youth vaping, ASH Wales have explored the need for additional data to inform policies and actions to address young people's access and use of vaping products.

Involving academic partners from Cardiff Research Group DECIPHer, Public Health Wales (PHW) tobacco leads, education professionals, young people and trading standards officers, ASH Wales developed a youth survey on smoking and vaping.

The development of the survey in June 2023, ran parallel with the establishment of an Incident Response Group (IRG) set up by PHW to investigate the rise of vaping amongst children and young people.

The focus of the IRG was to identify and assess potential control measures to address youth vaping. The group explored the data and evidence available and created a series of recommendations.

ASH Wales' survey was designed to complement the findings of the IRG and to support informed actions. Based on established methodologies and reliable national surveys, ASH Wales developed a template of questions exploring attitudes and behaviour of young people towards vaping and smoking.

Using the cloud-based survey software, SurveyMonkey, a test version of the survey was shared with key stakeholders including a cohort of young people aged 14 to 15.

Stakeholder feedback led to the consideration of key factors including:

- The accessibility of the survey by young people of various ages and ability
- The protection of pupil anonymity
- The average time taken to fill out the survey to be kept to a minimum
- Ease of access to the online form through school equipment or pupils' phones
- Survey needed to be filled out during class time or during registration

To reduce the likelihood of duplicate entries, the survey was designed so pupils could only fill it out once and their answers could not be amended.

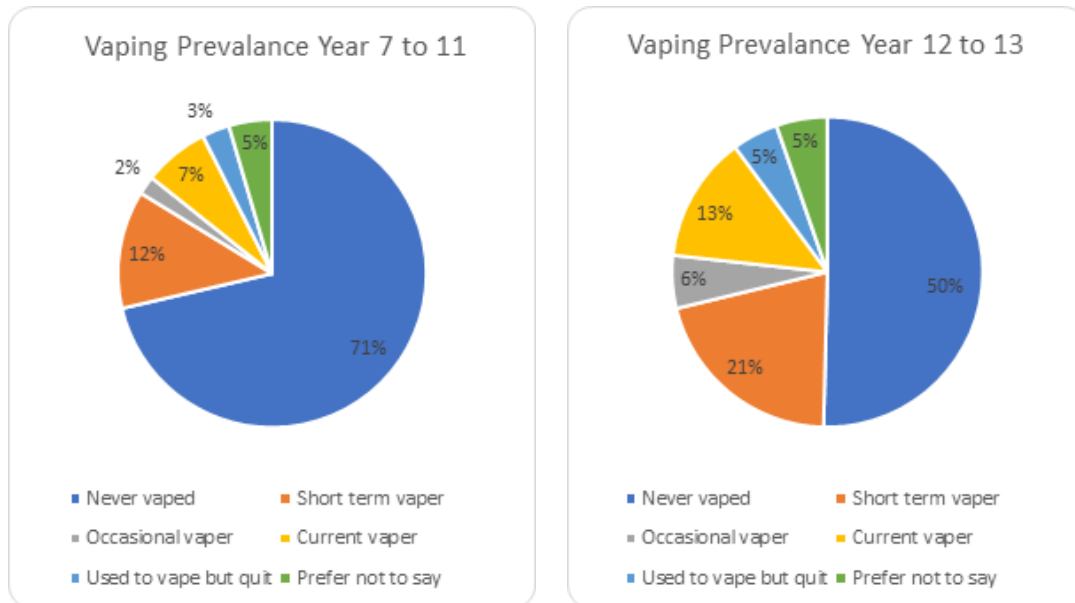
In September 2023, links to the survey in Welsh and English and information for parents explaining how the data would be used, was sent through the ASH Wales database to every secondary school and a number of FE colleges in Wales.

The survey which catered for pupils from year 7 through to year 13 was distributed to ASH Wales' database of secondary schools and colleges which had the contact details of 195 institutions. To ensure the survey was widely distributed we also circulated links through our connections with Healthy Schools officers across Wales.

Response across the year groups was consistent across all age groups from year 7 through to year 11 with significantly fewer responses from year 12 and 13. The number of respondents who identified as female (48%) and male (45%) was relatively equal with non-binary accounting for 1% and transgender as 1% of respondents. A total of 3% of pupils chose the free text option of "let me type", whilst 2% chose the prefer not to say option. The survey was designed to explore perceptions, exposure, usage, product acquisition, influences and feelings around dependency and withdrawal.

Prevalence

Vaping: All pupils were asked about their vaping habits.

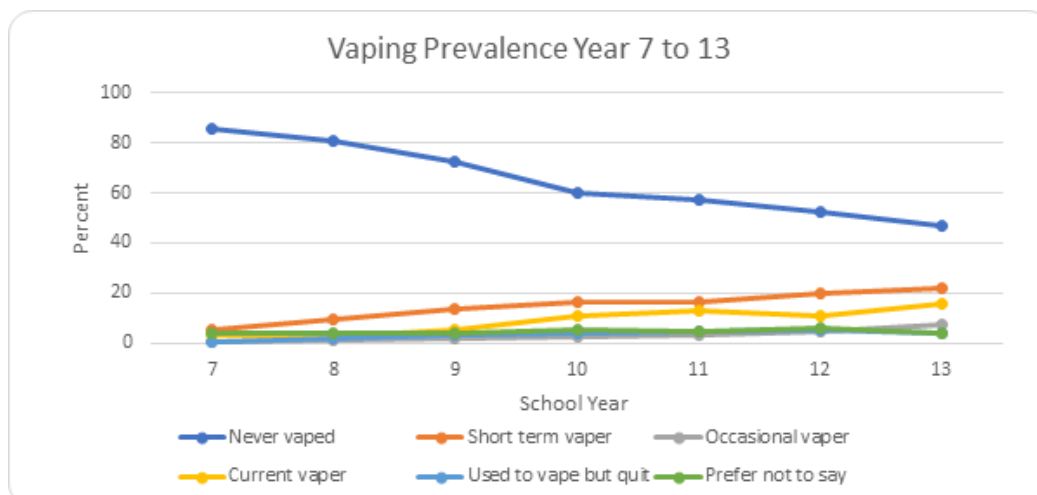


Vaping Prevalence Year 7 to 11

- Nearly a quarter (24%) of all children year 7 to 11 had ever tried vaping (short term, occasional, current and quit), rising to 38% of 15/16-year-olds (year 11)
- 7% of children year 7 to 11 were current vapers (more than once a week), rising to 13% of 15/16-year-olds (year 11) were current vapers
- 3% said they had quit vaping

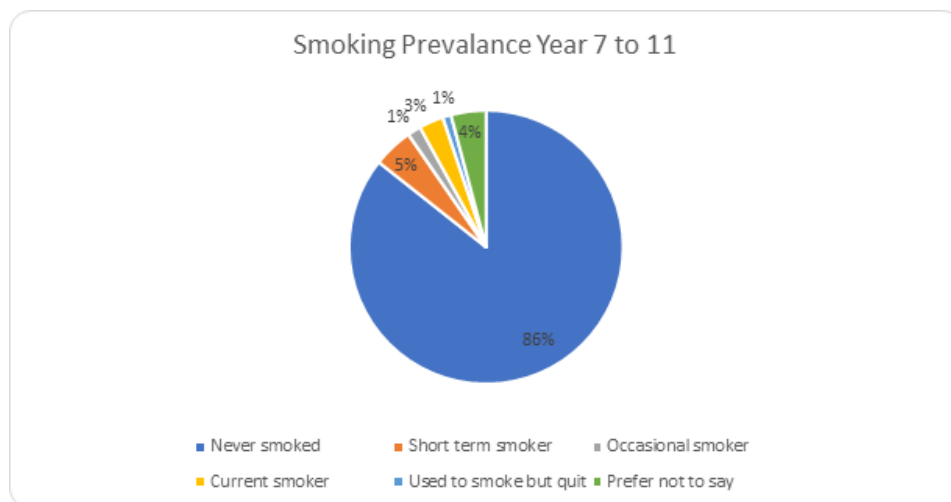
Vaping Prevalence Year 12 to 13

- 44% in year 12 and 13 reported to have tried vaping (short term, occasional, current and quit)
- 13% of year 12 and 13 reported to be current vapers
- 5% said they had quit vaping



- The majority of children year 7 to 11 had never tried vaping (71%), however the percentage of never vapers declined progressively year on year from 86% of year 7s down to 57% of year 11s
- There was a sharp rise in reported current vapers from year 9 (5%) through to year 10 (11%)
- The percentage of respondents who had never vaped fell to under half of all year 13s at 47%
- Experimentation and occasional use accounted for the majority of vaping usage across the year groups, with 60% of all pupils who reported having vaped or currently vaping, using vapes no more than once a week
- 14% of year 7 to 11 respondents said they experimented or vaped occasionally

Smoking: All pupils were asked about their smoking habits.

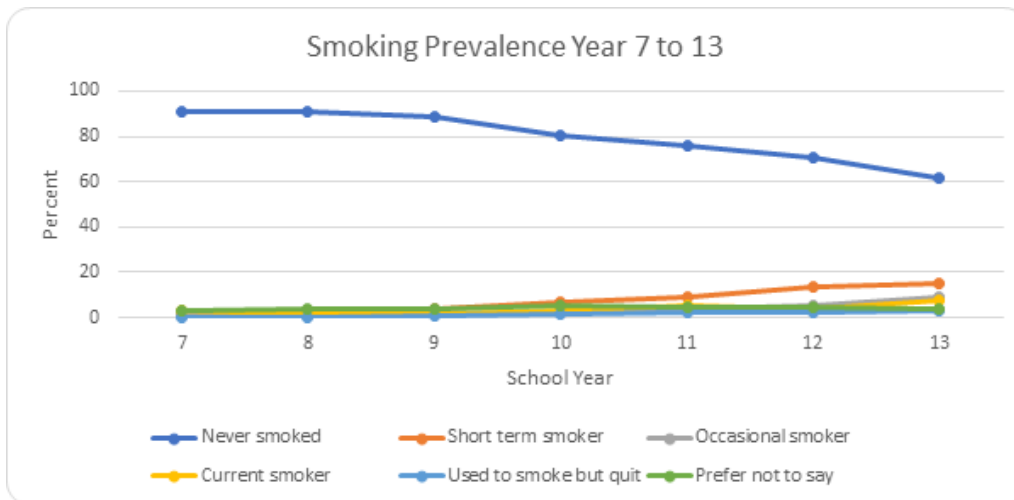


Smoking Prevalence Year 7 to 11

- 10% of year 7 to 11 reported to have ever tried smoking (short term, occasional, current and quit) rising to 20% of 15/16-year-olds (year 11)
- 3% of year 7 to 11 reported being current smokers (more than once a week) rising to 5% of 15/16-year-olds (year 11)
- 1% said they had quit smoking

Smoking Prevalence Year 12 to 13

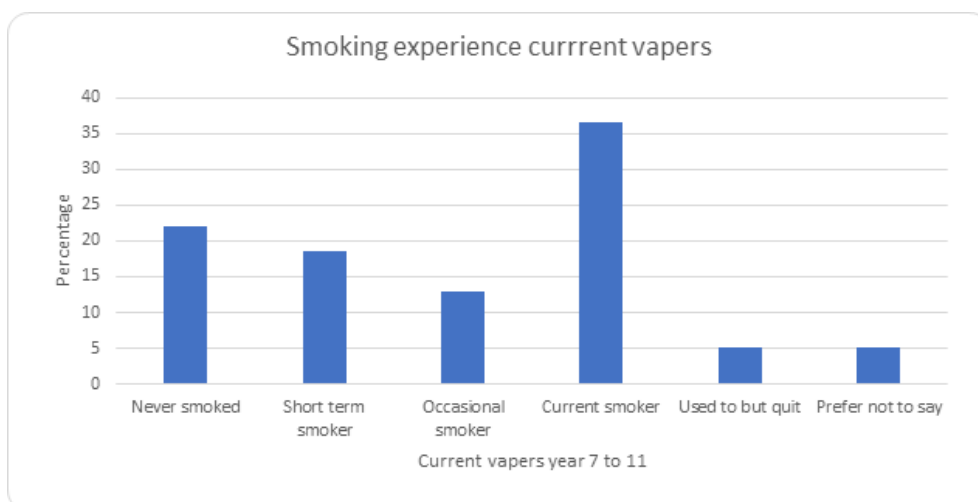
- 29% in year 12 and 13 reported to have ever tried smoking (short term, occasional, current and quit)
- 5% of year 12 and 13 reported to be current smokers
- 2% said they had quit smoking



Smoking Vs Vaping

- The proportion of current smokers in children year 7 to 11 was lower than that of current vapers (3% compared to 7%)
- The proportion of children year 7 to 11, ever having tried smoking was also significantly lower than those who had tried vaping (10% vs 24%)
- Smoking experimentation (short term and occasional) was significantly lower than vaping experimentation in children in year groups 7 to 11 (6% smoking vs 14% vaping)
- Smoking experimentation rises to similar levels of vaping experimentation in year 12 to 13 (21% smoking vs 26% vaping)

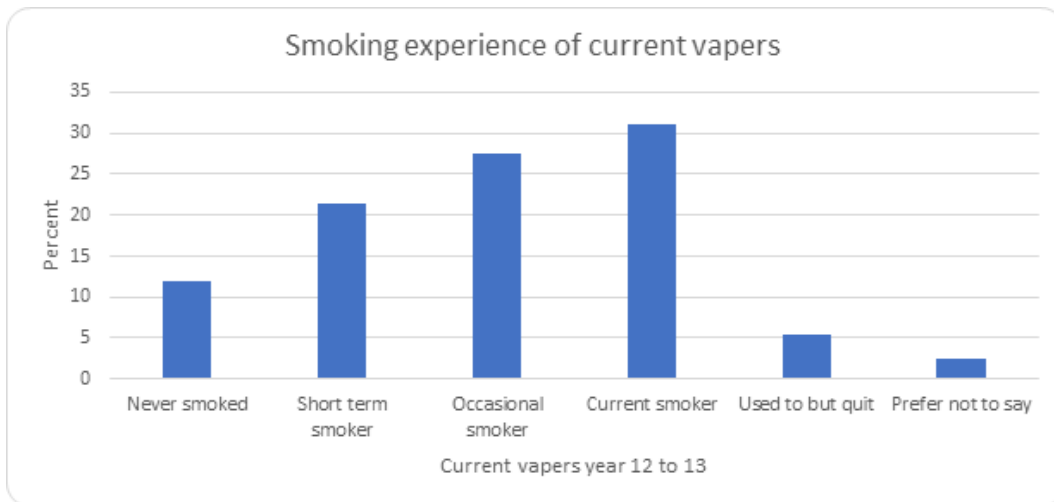
Smoking experience of vapers: Current vapers (more than once a week) were asked about their smoking experience.



Current Vapers Year 7 to 11

- 37% of current vapers also report being current smokers – compared to 3% of all pupils year 7 to 11
- A significant percentage of current vapers (22%) report being never smokers
- Only 5% of current vapers reported to have quit smoking

- A total of 73% of current vapers had experience of smoking

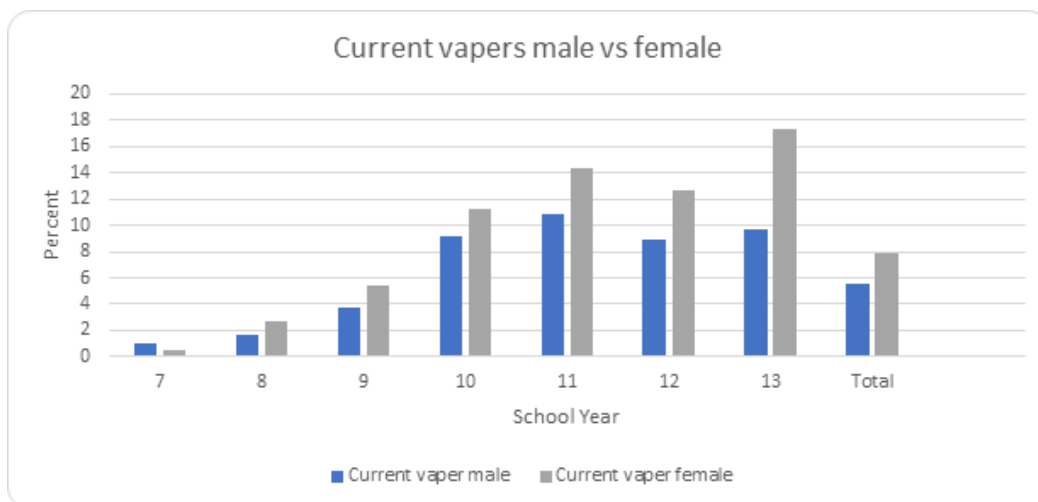


Similar patterns were reported in the year 12 to 13, but with a lower proportion of never smokers.

Current Vapers Year 12 to 13

- 31% of current vapers report being current smokers
- Only 12% of current vapers reported to be never smokers
- 6% of current vapers in year 12 to 13 reported having quit smoking
- A total of 86% of current vapers had either tried/ occasionally/current or quit smoking

Smoking and Vaping Prevalence: Male Vs Female



School year group	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total
Current vaper male %	1.0	1.6	3.7	9.1	10.8	8.9	9.7	5.5
Current vaper female %	0.6	2.7	5.4	11.2	14.3	12.7	17.4	7.9

- Current vaping prevalence was reported higher among females than males across all year groups rising in year 13 to 17% of reported females compared to 10% of reported males

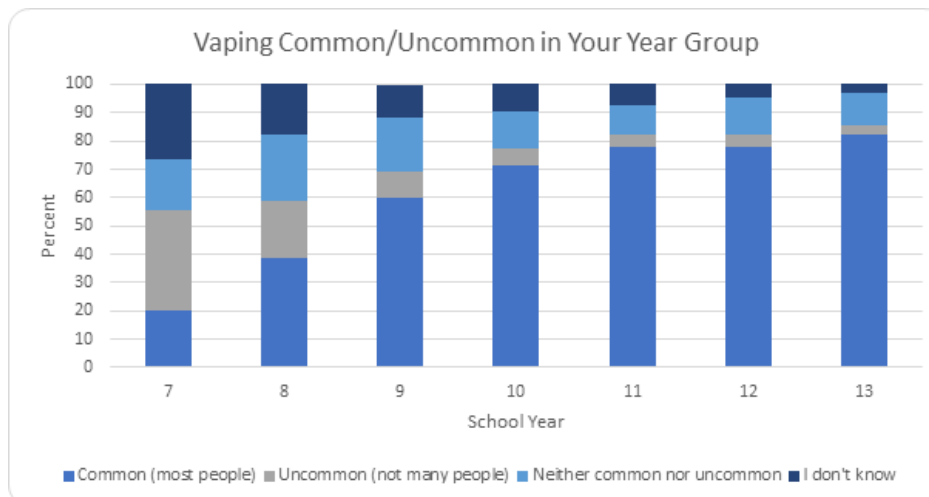
School year group	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total
Current smoker male %	1.2	1.1	1.1	3.3	4.8	2.9	3.8	2.3
Current smoker female %	0.3	1.1	1.4	2.4	4.7	3.1	6.2	2.3

- Smoking patterns were distributed more equally among females and males with a total of 2% of reported female and male respondents in year 7 to 13 reporting to be current smokers
- It was of note that smoking and vaping prevalence amongst those that identify as non-binary and transgender was significantly higher than across all groups

Environment

Exploring some of the known modifiable factors involved in the uptake of high-risk behaviours among young people, we asked pupils about their perceptions of vaping and their home environment.

Common/uncommon: All pupils were asked whether they viewed vaping as common or uncommon in their year group.



Percent	School year group							Total
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Common (most people)	19.9	38.4	59.7	71.6	77.7	77.8	82.5	56.9
Uncommon (not many people)	35.6	20.3	9.7	5.5	4.3	4.5	2.9	13.4
Neither common nor uncommon	18.3	23.4	18.9	13.2	10.8	12.9	11.6	16.6
I don't know	26.2	17.9	11.6	9.7	7.2	4.9	3.0	13.1

- Vaping was disproportionately viewed as common with over half of pupils citing vaping as common (57%) among their year group
- Perceptions of common increase across the year groups from 20% in year 7, rising to 83% of year 13s
- There was a notable increase from years 7, 8 and 9 with a levelling out over years 10,11 and 12

People they live with: All pupils were asked about the vaping and smoking habits of the people they lived with.

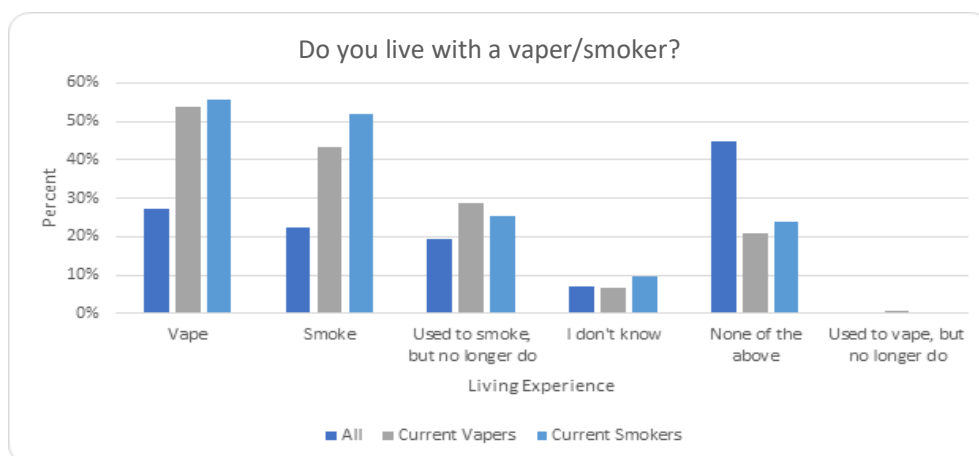
Percent	School year group							Total
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Vape	31.7	28.7	28.4	25.7	25.7	19.8	21.2	27.1
Used to vape	0.2	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.2	0.4
Smoke	24.7	24.6	22.3	22.5	21.7	15.1	21.2	22.5
Used to smoke	19.3	18	18.7	19.2	19.8	21	21.5	19.2
None of the above	38.8	42	43.9	44.9	48.3	55.6	52.5	44.9

Responses across all age groups were relatively consistent with pupils able to choose more than one option.

- 27% of all pupils reported living with someone who vaped
- 23% of all pupils reported living with someone who smoked
- 19% of all pupils reported living with someone who used to smoke
- Pupils who currently vape were twice as likely to live with a smoker or a vaper than pupils who had never vaped (**66% vs 32%**)

It is of note that 45% of all respondents reported not to be living with either a current or former, smoker or vaper.

When comparing pupils who currently smoke and/or vape with all responses, pupils who reported to be a current smoker or vaper were almost twice as likely to live with someone who smoked or vaped.

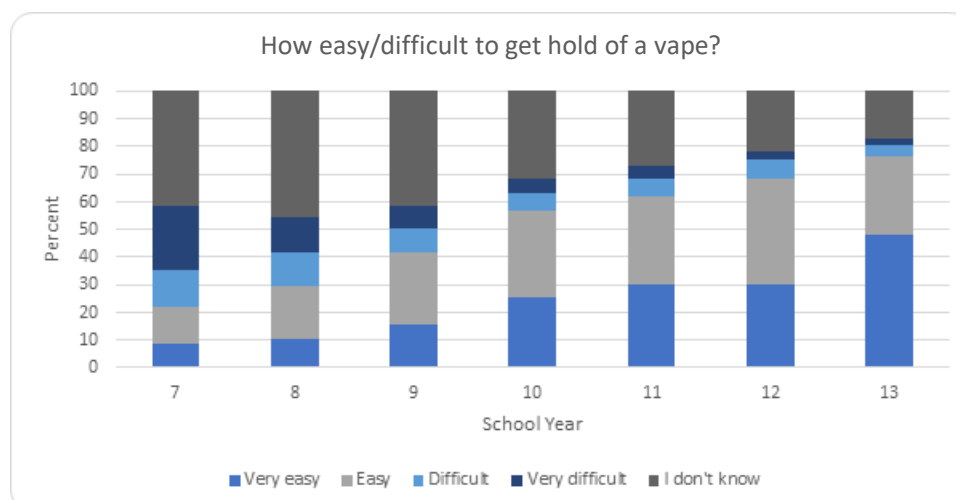


	All Pupils	Current Pupil Vapers	Current Pupil Smokers
Live with someone who %			
Vapes	27.1	53.8	55.7
Smokes	22.5	43.4	51.9
Used to smoke, but no longer do	19.2	28.6	25.4
I don't know	7.2	6.5	9.8
None of the above	44.9	20.8	23.7
Used to vape, but no longer do	0.4	0.7	0.3

Product Knowledge

Pupils were asked about product availability, purchase habits, age restrictions and product usage. A series of questions explored their understanding of how available vaping products were.

Product acquisition: All pupils were asked how easy it would be for them to buy or get hold of a vape



Percent	School year group						
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Very easy	8.9	10.2	15.6	25.2	30.2	30.3	48
Easy	13	19.4	26.2	31.8	31.6	38.3	28.7
Difficult	13.5	12	8.4	6.4	6.7	6.8	3.8
Very difficult	23.1	12.9	8.3	4.9	4.6	2.9	2.4
I don't know	41.6	45.5	41.6	31.8	27	21.7	17.1

- Reported ease of obtaining products increases significantly across the year groups with 22% of year 7s reporting that vapes are very easy or easy to get hold of compared to 62% of year 11s

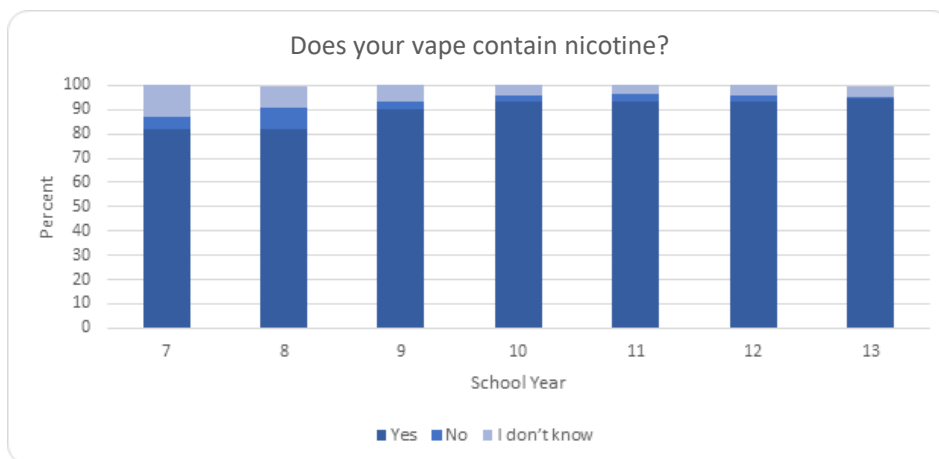
- 42% of year 7 to 11 report that vapes are very easy or easy to get hold of

It has been illegal in the UK to sell vaping devices and consumables to anyone under 18 since 2015.

- Responding to a question on how old you have to be to legally buy a vape, 71% of all pupils answered 18, including 67% of year 7s

Nicotine Content

Nicotine content: Current vapers year 7 to 13 were asked whether their vape contained nicotine.



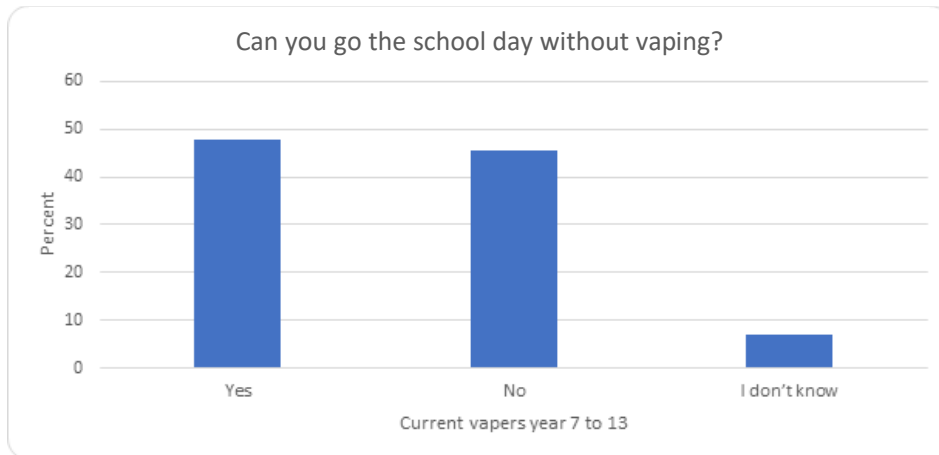
Percent	School year group							Total
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Yes	82.3	82.1	90.2	93.2	93.4	93.6	94.4	91.5
No	4.8	8.9	3.3	2.7	3.3	2.2	1.1	3.3
I don't know	12.9	8.9	6.6	4.1	3.3	4.3	4.4	5.2

Current vapers year 7 to year 13 (n=883) responded to the question on whether their vape contained nicotine.

- 92% said yes, 3% said no and 5% didn't know
- The use of vapes containing nicotine was consistent across the year groups with 82% of current vapers in year 7 reporting to use a vape containing nicotine
- The degree of certainty showed a gradual incline across the year groups with just 4% in year 13 not knowing whether their vapes contained nicotine

Nicotine Withdrawal

Current vapers year 7 to 13 were asked whether they felt like they could go the whole school day without vaping.



Current vapers: Can you go the whole school day without vaping?

Percent	School year							Total
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Yes	13	36	54	49	44	63	60	48
No	81	54	39	43	49	35	34	45
I don't know	7	11	7	9	7	2	6	7

- 45% of pupils who reported to be current vapers said they felt they could not go through the whole school day without vaping
- The percent remained relatively consistent across the year groups with the exception of year 7 who reported a higher instance of being unable to go the whole school day without vaping

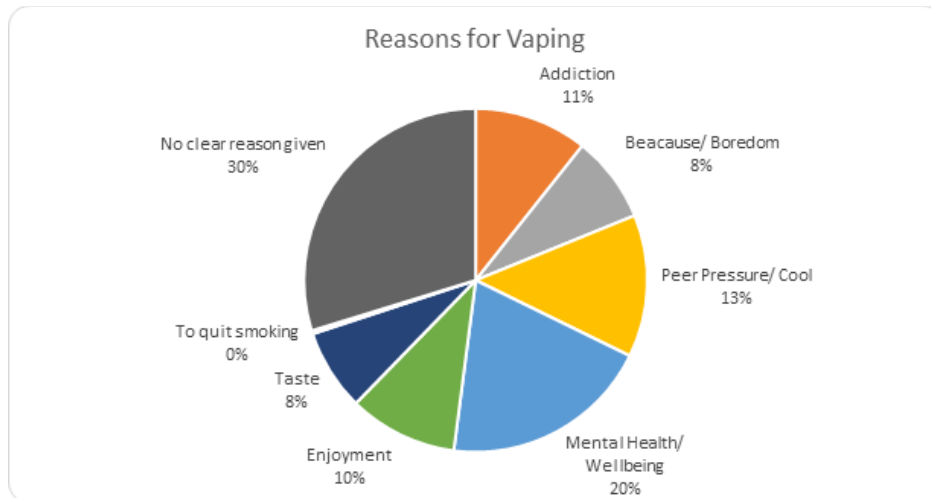
Current vapers year 7 to 13: Would you like to stop vaping?

Percent	School year							Total
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
No	77	63	51	47	47	36	40	48
Yes	17	20	24	25	30	29	29	26
I don't know	6	16	26	28	23	35	31	25

- 26% of all current vapers reported that yes, they would like to stop vaping
- 48% said no they would not

Current vapers year 7 to 13: Why do you think you vape?

Free text entry responses were reviewed and categorised, e.g., anything that referred to helping with any mental strain were categorised as 'coping'.



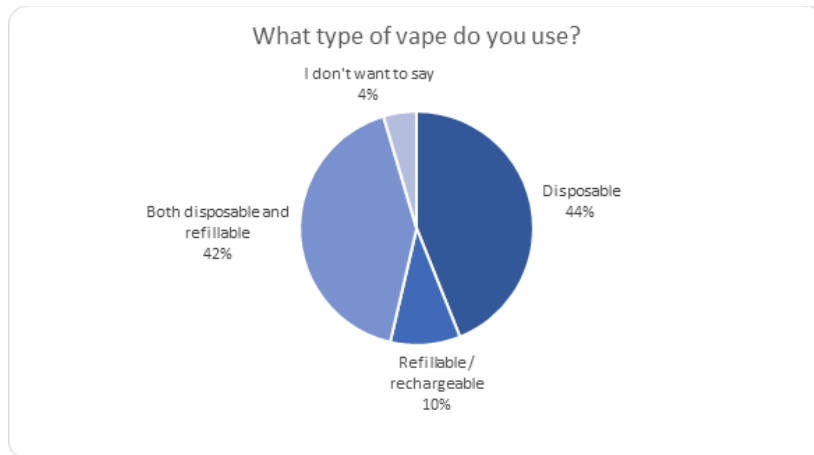
Current vapers year 7 to 13: Why do you think you vape?

- 20% reported stated reasons for vaping that could be categorised as for their mental health or wellbeing
- 13% as 'peer pressure' or to because its 'cool'
- 11% stated reasons related to 'addiction'
- 10% find vaping enjoyable and overall, a 'Nice' experience
- 8% listed 'taste' as their main reason
- 8% 'because' or 'boredom'
- Less than 1% said it was to quit smoking
- 30% provided responses that could not easily be categorised

Bc it helps **FAT ADDICTION**
 cus its nice **It relaxes me**
cause i love the niccy rush *cuz its cool. obvi.*
 class ini **coping mechanism** *bc its fun*
 pressure of everyone
its addicting **Helps calm me down**

Vaping Products Used

Current vapers were asked what kind of product they used and were provided with the choice of disposable, refillable or both.

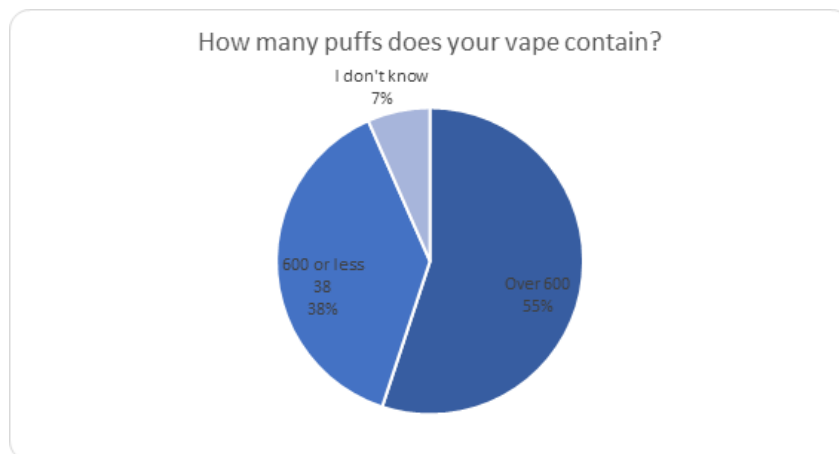


What type of vape do you use? Current vapers year 7 to 13

- Only 10% of current vapers reported to solely use refillable vapes
- 44% reported to solely use disposable vapes
- 42% reported to use both

UK regulations on vaping products restrict vape tank sizes to a capacity of no more than 2ml. Although there is no restriction on the number of puffs, vapes containing over 600 puffs are generally considered to be exceeding the tank size restriction and therefore illegal.

Current vapers year 7 to 13 were asked about how many puffs their vape contained.

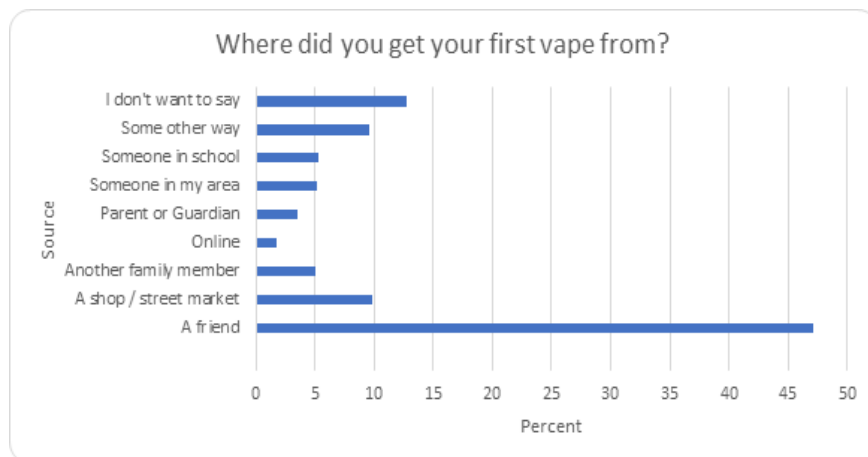


Percent	Total Current Vapers
Over 600	55
600 or less	38
I don't know	7

- Over half of all current vapers (55%) reported using a product that is highly likely to be illegal and unregulated containing over 600 puffs
- 7% of pupils who currently vape reported to not know how many puffs their vapes contained

Vape Acquisition

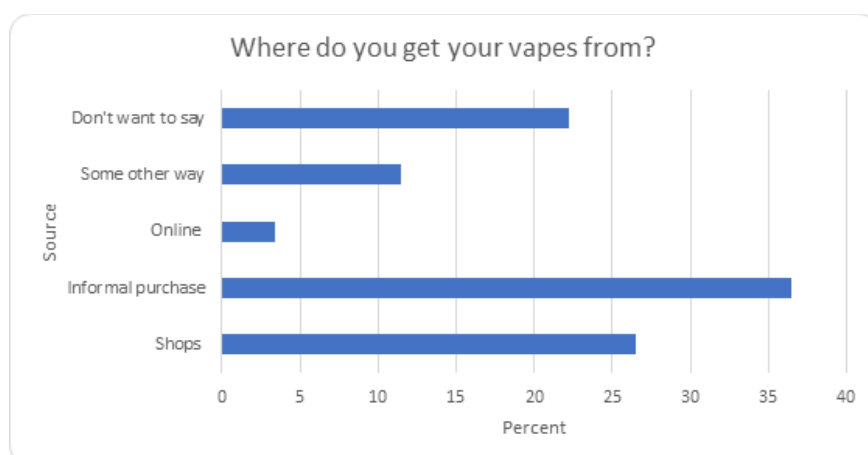
First vape: Current vapers in year 7 to 13 were asked about where they got their first vape.



Current vapers year 7 to 13: Where did you get your first vape from?

- 47% reported that they got it from a friend
- 10% reported to have got it from a shop
- Only 2% said that they had sourced the product online

Current vapers year 7 to 13: Where do you buy/ get your vapes from?



- Informal sources (friends / family and someone they know) account for 36%
- Shops account for 26% of reported purchases
- Online sales account for 3% of reported purchases

- A significant number of current vapers (22%) declined to report their purchase source

Key insights from the ASH Wales survey:

- Nearly a quarter of pupils in years 7 to 11 have tried vaping, with 7% reporting regular use
- A significant proportion of current vapers also smoke, and females are more likely to vape regularly than males
- The majority of current vapers use nicotine-containing devices, with many unable to go without vaping throughout the school day
- Over half of all pupils who vape use products likely to be illegal and unregulated
- Vaping is perceived as common among pupils, with many reporting easy access to vaping products
- Informal sources, such as friends and family, are common channels for obtaining vapes

The survey highlights concerns about youth vaping, including the prevalence of experimentation, easy access to products, and the use of unregulated products.

Recommendations include targeted education campaigns, stricter regulations, and support for young people to quit vaping and smoking. Addressing informal sources of vapes and understanding the influence of social environments are also identified as crucial strategies.