



Flavored Products Addict Youth

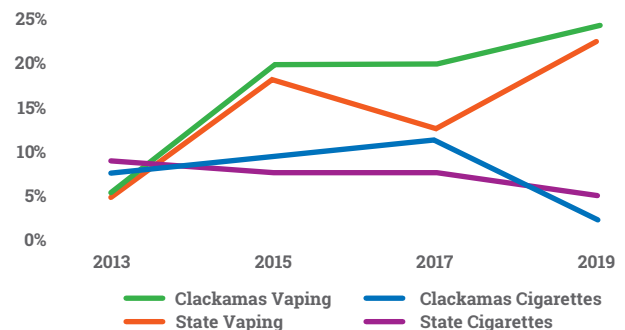
Teens overwhelmingly use e-cigarettes over conventional cigarettes, thanks to the tobacco industry's successful marketing of flavored products. While teen use of conventional cigarettes has fallen dramatically over decades (from 27.5% in 1991 to 2.9% in 2019), teen use of e-cigarettes has skyrocketed (from 1.5% in 2011 to 27.5% in 2019).¹ The drastic rise in vaping prompted the US Surgeon General to declare a public health epidemic.² Among youth who have ever used commercial tobacco products, over 80% reported that the first product they ever used was flavored.³ Tobacco companies know that targeting youth is fundamental to creating lifelong nicotine dependence.

The Portland metro region is experiencing the same epidemic of flavored nicotine use; the problem is even more pronounced in Clackamas County. When compared to their peers across Oregon, 11th graders in Clackamas County consistently use tobacco and vaping products at higher rates. In 2019, 27.2% of 11th grade students reported using any tobacco products – 26.1% of those people reported e-cigarette use. This was the highest rate in the region.⁴ Based on the Oregon Healthy Teen Survey, the percent of teens in Clackamas County who vape increased more than 4 times from 2013 to 2019.⁵

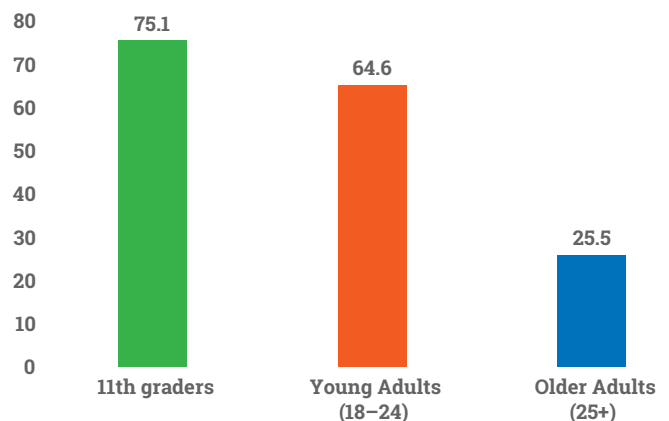
Youth who are using nicotine products are overwhelming choosing flavored tobacco. Youth-appealing flavors such as cotton candy are added to e-cigarettes and other nicotine delivery devices to soften the harsh taste and entice new users. In Oregon, 75% of 11th graders who use tobacco products report that they use flavored products. Compare that with just 25% of adults over the age of 25 and it becomes clear that flavored tobacco has a clear target demographic.⁶

Percent of 11th Graders Using Cigarettes or Vaping

Source: Oregon Healthy Teens and Student Health Survey
Created by: Clackamas County Public Health Aug. 2022



Percentage of Flavored Tobacco or Vaping Product Use Among Current Tobacco Users by Selected Age Groups, Oregon, 2019



'Commercial tobacco', manufactured and marketed by the tobacco industry, includes smoking products like cigarettes, smokeless products like chew, and Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems like e-cigarettes, vape pens and puff bars.

It is necessary to make a distinction between commercial tobacco and traditional tobacco, used by American Indian tribes and nations as medicine with spiritual and ceremonial importance. Traditional tobacco is often used in its purest form or mixed with other native plants. Commercial tobacco is sold for profit and includes harmful chemicals that cause disease and death.

Rising Rates and Inequity

Tobacco companies have a long history of using predatory methods to deliberately attract specific groups, including people of color, low-income individuals, and LGBTQ communities.^{7,8} These methods, which include targeted advertising, price discounts, and more retailers in certain neighborhoods, have caused persistent inequities among nicotine product users. Because brains are developing until mid-20s, youth are especially susceptible to the tobacco industry marketing products in colorful packaging and sweet flavors.^{1,7,9,10}

In 2019, Congress launched an investigation into JUUL's role in the youth nicotine epidemic, including its marketing to youth, misleading health claims, and new partnerships with traditional tobacco companies.¹¹ After two days of hearings, committee members concluded that JUUL egregiously marketed their product to youth and falsified claims about its effectiveness as a smoking cessation device.¹¹ In spite of those findings, brands like Puff Bar continue to skirt regulations and novel products to young people.

Race and Ethnicity

Massive inequities for tobacco product use exist across different racial and ethnic communities. Like many racial disparities, this happens by design.¹² Youth of color are more vulnerable to tobacco product initiation due to higher exposure to marketing and products in the retail environment.⁹ 2019 data show significant disparities between race/ethnicity and exposure to tobacco products among 11th graders across Oregon.⁵

Sixty-four percent of American Indian/Alaska Native teens reported visiting a convenience store one or more times a week where tobacco is prolific, while only 33% of Asian or Pacific Islander teens reported the same. Much of this disparity is the consequence of the forced relocation of American Indian nations away from ancestral lands, resulting in reservations being surrounded by food deserts in which convenience stores often exist in lieu of grocery stores.^{12,13,14}

Nearly a quarter (24%) of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander youth regularly use nicotine products. The same is true for American Indian and Alaska Native and multiracial youth, with regular tobacco use rates at 21% and 17%, respectively. E-cigarettes are the most commonly used nicotine product for youth of color. These disparities last a lifetime. In Oregon, 18% of the non-Hispanic White population in Oregon smokes, compared to almost 30% of American Indian and Alaska Native, 26% Pacific Islanders, and 25% of African American adults.^{15,16,17,18}

Socioeconomic Status

The tobacco industry saturates lower-income neighborhoods with tobacco ads and discounts. Increased availability, combined with high levels of emotional stress, leads to more smoking among low-income youth and adults. More than one in three adults with a household income of less than \$15,000 a year smoke in Oregon. In comparison, one in 10 adults in Oregon with a household income of more than \$50,000 a year smoke.^{19,20,21}

Percentage of adult cigarette smoking, by select demographic groups, Oregon, 2019

Table 6.1

Annual household income	Percentage (%)
Less than \$20,000	30.2
\$20,000–\$49,999	19.5
\$50,000 or more	10.1

LGBTQ

Although lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals account for a small percentage of the total US population, they are disproportionately impacted by nicotine. Nearly 21% of LGB adults are current smokers. In comparison, about 15% of non-LGB-identified adults smoke. Young LGBTQ people, aged 18-24, are nearly two times more likely to smoke than their non-LGBT-identified peers.²²⁻²⁷

Health impacts: Vaping is NOT Harmless

E-cigarettes share many of the same dangers as traditional cigarettes since they contain numerous known toxins.²⁴ Additionally, e-cigarettes contain extremely high levels of nicotine: one JUUL pod can contain as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes.²⁸ Nicotine is highly addictive and can cause serious harm in young people's developing brains, impacting learning, memory, and attention.^{29,30,31}

There is substantial evidence that e-cigarette use increases risk of ever using combustible tobacco cigarettes among youth and young adults. Further, people who vape often also use tobacco products (dual use). A study of nearly 40,000 people found that dual users smoked more cigarettes per day and reported more breathing difficulty compared to cigarette-only users.^{32,33} The harmful effects of e-cigarettes underscore the importance of preventing youth from starting.

Vaping and COVID-19

COVID-19 is a virus that causes respiratory distress. As such, any environmental exposure that weakens the respiratory system has the potential to worsen COVID-19 outcomes. Both conventional and e-cigarette users are much likelier to be diagnosed with COVID-19, and they are much likelier to experience symptoms. A positive COVID-19 diagnosis was seven times more likely among young dual users of cigarettes and e-cigarettes. Symptoms were five times more likely among youth who ever used e-cigarettes. The good news is that the strong relationship between COVID-19 symptoms and tobacco use disappeared among those who had not recently vaped or smoked.³⁴

Protect Our Youth: Proven Strategies

Clackamas, Washington, and Multnomah Counties can meaningfully reduce access and use of tobacco and nicotine products among young people through policy change.

In the last five years, Oregon has passed two meaningful policies to curb youth nicotine use. In 2018, Oregon enacted Tobacco 21 (T21), the law that restricts the sale of tobacco to people over age 21. Since T21 was passed, initiation decreased significantly among current tobacco users aged 13-17 (34% to 25%) and aged 18-20 years (23% to 18%).³⁵

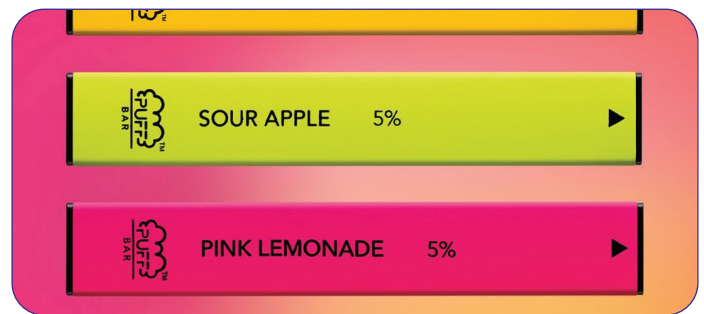
The second strategy is called Tobacco Retail Licensing (TRL). Licensing is commonplace; from alcohol to cannabis, licenses are an effective tool to maintain safety standards, guard public health, and ensure compliance with operational requirements. Starting on January 1, 2022, Oregon rolled out a new statewide tobacco retail license for any business selling tobacco and nicotine products. TRL helps track and regulate the sale of tobacco and nicotine products, ensures retailers comply with state and federal laws, and prevents youth from purchasing these products.

Numerous studies find that requiring a license to sell tobacco and embedding retailer education and enforcement mechanisms into the license effectively reduces youth access to tobacco and nicotine products.^{36,37} TRL creates the necessary foundation to implement proven strategies, such as prohibiting the sale of flavored products and limiting the density and number of tobacco retailers.

Ban the sale of flavored products

Nationwide, 80% of youth who have ever used a nicotine product started with a flavored product. Kid-friendly flavorings including fruit, bubble gum, cotton candy and chocolate mask the harsh taste of tobacco products.³⁸ Since 2009, flavors other than menthol have been banned in traditional cigarettes to help decrease youth use, but this ban does not apply to e-cigarettes.

In 2020, the FDA banned most flavored e-cigarette cartridge flavors (excluding mint/menthol). However, a large loophole allowed all flavors to continue to be sold in disposable devices. The tobacco industry started marketing non-refillable devices such as Puff Bar, Posh and blu to keep youth addicted to flavored products. As a result, disposable devices are the most popular type of e-cigarettes among youth.³⁸ The FDA regulations do not address the root problem of flavor use, which is why we need stronger local action.



There are over 300 jurisdictions across the U.S that have imposed additional flavor bans. Flavor bans in Massachusetts municipalities demonstrated a significant impact on youth nicotine initiation and current use. Notably this result was even stronger when neighboring municipalities also had a flavor ban in effect. This highlights the importance of the widespread adoption of flavor bans.³⁹

In December of 2021, Washington County passed an ordinance that prohibits the sale of flavored vaping products and menthol cigarettes and prohibits tobacco vending machines and price promotions/discounts. This is the first ban of its kind in Oregon. The nicotine industry challenged this ban with a ballot measure, which forced Washington County voters to decide the fate of the ban. This May, with over 76% of the vote, Washington County voters overwhelmingly chose to keep the flavor ban. This outcome shows that there is public support to protect children from nicotine products and opens the door for other counties or the state to follow suit.

Remove nicotine from school zones

When retailers of tobacco products are located near homes and schools, people smoke or vape more and have worse health. Further, communities of color and less affluent communities are more likely to have higher densities of tobacco retail outlets.^{40,41,42} Studies have consistently shown that youth are more likely to smoke when they live or go to school in neighborhoods with a high density of tobacco retailers.^{43,44,45} In addition to location, retailer density matters. Several studies have found that the density of tobacco outlets in school neighborhoods is related to experimental smoking, and that youth living in areas with the highest density of tobacco retailers are more likely to have smoked cigarettes in the past month than those in areas of the lowest density of retailers.⁴⁶⁻⁵¹

In the United States, 44% of teenagers attend a school that is within 1,000 feet of a tobacco retailer, and 77% of all public schools are only a ten-minute walk to a tobacco retailer location. Limiting locations where tobacco products are sold can reduce density and proximity to schools and other youth-populated areas.

In Clackamas County, over half of public schools have a tobacco retailer within a ten-minute walk from campus.

Price Promotion Regulation

The price of tobacco products has a direct and significant effect on usage. The tobacco industry is aware that people use less when prices rise, so they have spent billions of dollars each year on price promotions to make tobacco and nicotine prices more affordable and accessible. In 2018, The Federal Trade Commission reported the industry spent 85%, or \$7.2 billion of its total budget, on price promotions. Youth are more sensitive to nicotine price increases than adults. For every 10% cigarettes price increase, youth use is

reduced by 5%. There is a strong association between youth receiving a price promotion for e-cigarettes and youth initiating, currently using, and regularly using those products.⁵²

Taking Action

Parents, Prevention Partners and Advocacy Groups:

Join Flavors Hook Oregon Kids, a statewide movement to protect children from tobacco and nicotine use. Visit www.flavorshookoregonkids.org to learn more.

Talk with your local corner store about limiting advertising and/or sale of nicotine products.

If you have been impacted by flavored tobacco or nicotine or know youth who have been impacted, consider writing a letter to the editor to your local news outlet. Media coverage is a great way to elevate an issue and need for policy changes.

Write or call your elected officials to share why flavored tobacco should be prohibited in your county or state. They need to know that parents and advocacy groups want to break the cycle of nicotine addiction that begins in adolescence. Visit www.usa.gov/elected-officials to find your federal, state, and local officials.

Schools

Advocate for zoning restrictions to limit tobacco retail density near schools. Start by educating decision makers on the problem of youth access to tobacco and nicotine products in neighborhoods.

Stay informed about emerging nicotine products to talk with youth about the risks. The Truth Initiative

Percentage and Number of Oregon Retailers with Tobacco Product Marketing, Tri-County Region, 2018

Source: Oregon Health Authority. Tobacco Retail Assessment, 2018. As of February 2022, there are approximately 290 businesses that sell tobacco products in Clackamas County

Locale	Any tobacco product or advertisement that is placed in a manner that appeals to youth	Tobacco advertisements within 3 ft. of the floor	Tobacco products 12 inches from toys	Any tobacco price promotion	Flavored tobacco available	Total number of retailers
Oregon	33.0%	21.4%	19.7%	63.9%	93.2%	3145
Clackamas	15.4%	4.4%	12.3%	39.0%	93.4%	240
Multnomah	30.8%	16.6%	19.8%	73.1%	93.7%	608
Washington	36.4%	21.9%	30.7%	53.5	88.2%	265

and Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids maintain robust libraries of fact sheets and research. Support school-based prevention programs and education.

Participate in Student Health Survey to monitor trends in tobacco and nicotine use, inform decisions and actions, and prioritize resources.

Encourage students to quit tobacco and nicotine. The Truth Initiative's This Is Quitting (Text QUIT to 88709) is peer-to-peer support via text specifically for youth that has shown to be a very effective support tool for youth looking to quit nicotine products.

Local Public Health Authorities

Work with diverse communities to better understand the impact of flavored tobacco products on youth of color. Data collection should be led by community partners in a way that builds trust and accesses the expertise of communities.

Support community partners with data, resources, and a platform to elevate their personal stories. Educate community partners and decision-makers about options to address youth use of tobacco and nicotine use through policy and environmental changes.

Decision Makers and Elected Officials

Pass policies that reduce access to flavored products to youth, including flavor bans, zoning restrictions, and prohibiting price promotions for nicotine products. Statewide and national policies often start with a groundswell of local policies that demonstrate support for stronger protections for youth.

Flavored nicotine use among youth is an epidemic across the country, state, and here in the region.

There are proven policy solutions that protect youth from the harms of tobacco and vaping products, please visit www.clackamas.us/publichealth/dangers-of-youth-vaping to learn more.

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