

# Targeting youth vaping in British Columbia through education and policy regulation

Arti Shridhar, Simon Fraser University

**Keywords:** policy; vape/ vaping; public health

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy brief is to bring awareness to the prevalence of youth vaping in British Columbia and provide recommendations to tackle this issue.

## Executive summary

The dangers of vaping posed to youth living in British Columbia is an issue that must be promptly addressed by policymakers. Rates of vaping among adolescents has risen over the past seven years (Muhajarine & Stitchell, 2020) and is associated with health issues such as addiction (Jubas-Malz, 2020) and respiratory illnesses (Gilley & Beno, 2020). Rising rates of vaping among adolescents may be further attributed to influences from peers or targeted advertising (East et al., 2019; Struik et al., 2020). This policy brief outlines the main concerns associated with vaping, as well as actions that can be taken to reduce the incidence of youth uptake. Public policy should aim to curb youth vaping in British Columbia by implementing control policies (education and restriction) within schools to discourage and prevent vaping, and to strictly regulate the marketing and availability of vape products.

## Overview of the dangers of vaping

Vape products carry significant health risks and dangers, as usage has been associated with respiratory damage among other issues, such as lung injury, burns, seizures, acute nicotine toxicity (Gilley & Beno, 2020) and a novel respiratory illness (Health, 2019). The long-term health effects of vaping are unknown (Jaspers, 2019; Bosma & Landman, 2019). Furthermore, vapes are a gateway product that are linked to a higher risk of developing a nicotine addiction. Youth tend to be drawn to popular vape brands in Canada (such as JUUL), which have higher nicotine levels compared to other brands (Colacci, 2020). Studies also show that approximately 32% of youth previously engaged in vaping, before graduating to tobacco products, such as cigarettes (Jubas-Malz, 2020).

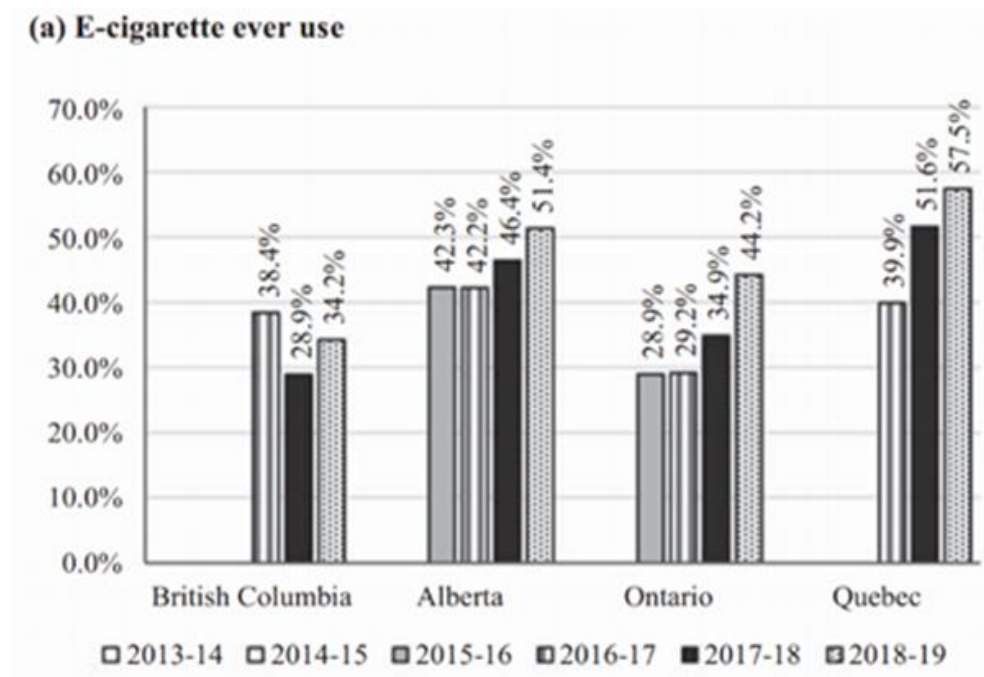
## Vaping trends

There is an increased prevalence of vaping among young people, as approximately 20% of grade 6 to 12 students reported recently using e-cigarettes, compared to 6% in 2014 (Muhajarine, &

Stitchell, 2020). Moreover, the prominence of youth vaping has increased by 2-3 times over the years compared to adult rates within British Columbia and in other provinces across Canada as well (Chadi et al., 2019; Cole et al., 2021).

### Figure 1(a)

Prevalence of e-cigarette ever use by province and year (Cole et al., 2021).



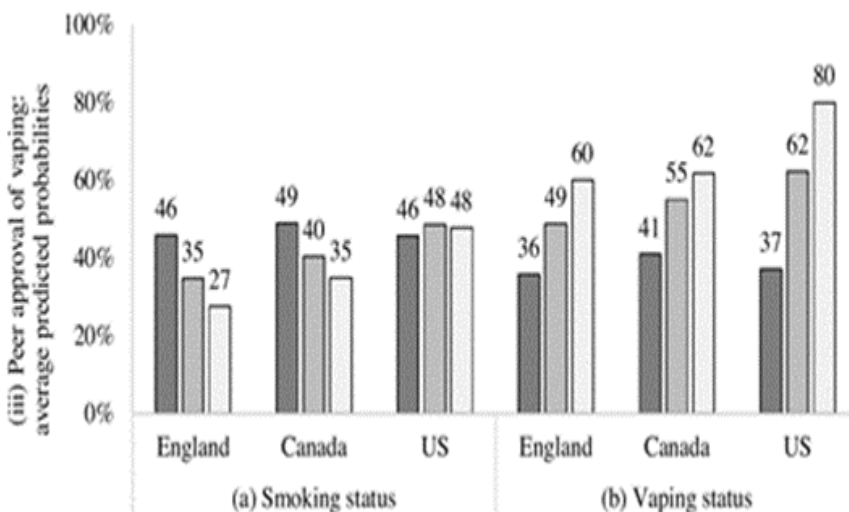
## Influences

### Peers

An uptake in vaping by youth may be attributed to factors like peer pressure, since peer approval, perceived social benefit, and appeal (looking cool, performing smoke tricks) draws youth into participating (Jubas-Malz, 2020; Health, 2019; East et al., 2019).

### Figure 1(iii)

Interactions between country and (a) smoking status and (b) vaping status with peer approval of vaping (East et al., 2019).



## Influences

### *Vape companies*

Vape companies are notorious for using strategic advertising techniques to reach youth populations and encourage vaping. In retailers, products are intentionally placed at point-of-sale next to items that are popular to youth, such as candy, in order to draw them into purchasing vape products. Online advertising is also a main culprit, as glamorized lifestyles are promoted on social media and advertisements on the internet that specifically advertise appealing flavours and design, especially via celebrity endorsements (Hammond et al., 2021; Reichardt & Guichon, 2019). These tactics (appealing design and flavours) cater towards the interests of younger individuals and encourages them to take up vaping (Gilley & Beno, 2020; Struik et al., 2020).

### **Lack of education as a main contributing factor**

There are educational discrepancies that contribute to the increasing prevalence of vaping, as youth are largely misinformed about the risks associated with vapes (Kanyadan & Ganti, 2019). Evidence shows that the original intention of vapes as smoking cessation device for adults has been misconstrued as inadequate information dissemination has led to vapes being used as smoking initiation devices by youth (Reichardt & Guichon, 2019).

## Policy Action

### *Education*

One option to reduce the prevalence of youth vaping is to implement education and control programs within schools. A potential implementation plan could include banning the possession and use of e-cigarettes on school property (Health, 2019; Milicic et al., 2018). Furthermore, educational programs could teach youth about the dangers of vaping, in addition to other programs that incentivize students to cease their habit or addiction by implementing buy back initiatives for their vape products (Thomas, 2019; Turcato, 2019).

## **Policy Action**

### ***Provincial Regulation***

A second option to tackle this issue is to adjust provincial policy regulations regarding marketing and availability of vapes to youth. This may be implemented by reducing the amount of targeted marketing and advertising that is designed to appeal to youth (Hammond et al., 2020), introducing bans to prohibit the sale of vapes to minors (Nguyen, 2020), and implementing stricter regulations regarding general access and purchase of vape products, such as flavour restriction and additional taxation (Labos, 2019).

### **Recommendations/ conclusion**

A combination of policies must be implemented in order to best ensure that positive changes are made for youth in British Columbia in regard to vaping. Introducing policies and programs within schools will aim to discourage and prevent vape use by youth while simultaneously providing education and information for them to make informed, healthy decisions on their own behalf. Another strategy is the implementation of stricter regulations regarding the extent to which companies can market their products, in addition to the content of these advertisements. Finally, maintaining (or further imposing) restrictions on vape products, such as limiting the availability of flavours and introducing taxes to deter purchases, will also be beneficial. The application of these policies will allow for British Columbian legislation to address the ongoing issue of youth vaping.

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