



Media Release

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New research finds Aussie teens find illegal vapes easy to access

New Australian-first research published today in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health shows nearly 80% of New South Wales teenagers who have vaped found it “easy” to access e-cigarettes from multiple illegal sources and that flavour was the main factor driving product choice.

The Generation Vape study, led by Cancer Council NSW in partnership with the Daffodil Centre and University of Sydney and supported by the Minderoo Foundation, is the leading Australian study to survey teenagers about their experiences and perceptions of vapes.

It found 70% of teenage e-cigarette users obtained the products freely from an individual while 30% purchased it themselves, either from a “friend” or from commercial retail outlets such as convenience stores and tobacconists. Teens also reported purchasing vapes through social media, at vape stores and on websites.

Anita Dessaix, a co-author of the study and chair of Cancer Council’s Public Health Committee, said the findings showed that government controls aimed at protecting young people from e-cigarettes were failing.

“Whichever way teenagers obtain e-cigarettes, they are all illegal, yet it’s happening under the noses of federal and state authorities,” Ms Dessaix said. “All Australian governments say they’re committed to ensuring e-cigarettes are only accessed by smokers with a prescription trying to quit – yet a crisis in youth e-cigarette use is unfolding in plain view.

“Unless all governments, federal, state and territory, urgently crack down on the illegal importation and retail and wholesale sale of e-cigarettes and their widespread illegal use in young adults, teenage vaping will go from emergency to crisis.”

Study chief investigator, Associate Professor Becky Freeman from the University of Sydney, said the findings reflect how e-cigarettes are made and promoted for a teenage market.

“The vapes preferred by teenagers come in a wide range of flavours tailored for kids, such as desserts, energy drinks, and bubble gum” A/Professor Freeman said. “They’re cheap, disposable, easy to use and access, and contain nicotine.

She said the results showed that vaping is normalised for teenagers – despite product manufacturers and lobbyists claiming they are smoking cessation aids for adults. “Among the teens surveyed, 32% had ever vaped at least a few puffs of a vape. Of those who have vaped, more than half had never previously smoked.” A/Prof Freeman said.

NSW teen Ruby Ellis (17), has been vaping for three years and has been trying to quit for nine months, saying “I knew that it was addictive when I first started vaping, but you don’t really think about it too much. You don’t fully realise what addicted means or how addictive it is until you become hooked”.

Ruby is just one of the many young people in NSW who now vape and describes it as being everywhere at all times. “All the time, it’s everywhere you go. When somebody has a cup of coffee, or when they’re studying, even in the toilets during breaks”.

Ms Dessaix noted that more needs to be done urgently to effectively enforce regulations and protect all young Australians from the harms of e-cigarettes

“The Federal Government must act to stop the unlawful import of e-cigarettes at the border and state and territory governments need to crack down hard on retailers who are openly and illegally selling nicotine e-cigarettes without a valid prescription,” she added.

“The Australian National University’s study on e-cigarettes, which is the most comprehensive evidence review published anywhere in the world to date, found that e-cigarette use in non-smokers tripled the risk of smoking uptake compared with non-smokers who don’t vape.

“Unless governments urgently enforce laws designed to ensure e-cigarettes are only accessed by individuals trying to quit smoking, we may see the unimaginable occur – youth smoking rates in Australia increasing.”

[Visit the Cancer Council website for more information about e-cigarettes.](#)

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Media enquiries

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Notes to editor

For more information about vaping and what to look out for as a parent, visit the [Cancer Council NSW website](#)