

Study Reveals One in Three UK Teen Vapers Later Take Up Smoking

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A major new study found that nearly one in three UK teenagers who vape are likely to later take up smoking cigarettes, raising renewed concerns about youth vaping and nicotine addiction. In contrast, approximately 1.5 per cent of teens who did not vape went on to smoke, suggesting a potential gateway correlation.

The findings are based on an intergenerational study examining cohorts born in 1958, 1970, and 2001. It suggests that vaping, once promoted as a safer smoking alternative, may now be contributing to a new generation's nicotine addiction, despite not demonstrating causation.

Around 20 percent of 11– to 17–year–olds in Great Britain report having tried vaping—similar to 2023 levels. Youth smoking rates have increased from 14 percent in 2023 to 21 percent in 2025, a reversal after decades of decline. Researchers note this marks a sharp reversal after years of public health progress.

While the study does not confirm vaping causes smoking, its strong correlation has alarmed public health experts. Experts caution that nicotine may impair developing brains, affecting mood regulation, concentration and impulse control. Nicotine addiction acquired during adolescence is likely to persist into adulthood, making cessation more difficult. In response, the UK government is advancing the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which aims to prohibit the sale of tobacco to those born on or after 1 January 2009, and to impose tighter restrictions on vape packaging, flavours and display. A ban on disposable vapes is scheduled to take effect from 1 June 2025.

In addition to regulatory action, a nationwide study launched this year will follow 100,000 young people to better understand the long-term health and social effects of vaping. Meanwhile, the NHS has opened its first youth vaping clinic in Liverpool, treating children as young as 11 for nicotine dependency using personalised therapies and nicotine replacement treatments.

Health experts are urging stricter age enforcement, bans on sweet flavours and bright packaging, and enhanced school-based education to curb youth vaping. They acknowledge that vaping may assist adults quitting smoking but warn its popularity among teens threatens decades of gains in reducing youth tobacco use.