In recent years, tobacco companies have significantly stepped up the introduction and marketing of flavored non-cigarette tobacco products, especially e-cigarettes. These products are widely available and popular with kids. Flavored e-cigarettes are undermining the nation’s overall efforts to reduce youth tobacco use and putting a new generation of kids at risk of nicotine addiction and the serious health harms that result from tobacco use.

Electronic Cigarettes Are the Most Popular Tobacco Product Among Youth

Given the dramatic growth in the availability and marketing of e-cigarettes, it is no surprise that e-cigarettes have been the most commonly used tobacco product among youth since 2014. In December 2018, the Surgeon General issued an advisory on e-cigarette use among youth, declaring the growing problem an epidemic.¹

- Among high school students, e-cigarette use increased by 135% from 2017 to 2019, increasing from 11.7% to 27.5%. 5.3 million youth were current e-cigarette users in 2019 - an increase of over 3 million students since 2017.²

- According to the CDC, “The rise in e-cigarette use during 2017-2018 is likely because of the recent popularity of e-cigarettes shaped like a USB flash drive, such as JUUL; these products can be used discreetly, have a high nicotine content, and come in flavors that appeal to youths.”³ JUUL e-cigarettes make up about two-thirds of the e-cigarette market share.⁴

E-Cigarettes are Widely Available in Kid-Friendly Flavors

Internal tobacco industry documents show that tobacco companies have a long history of using flavors to reduce the harshness of their products to make them more appealing to new users, almost all of whom are under age 18.⁵ In recent years, there has been an explosion of sweet-flavored tobacco products, especially e-cigarettes. As of 2017, researchers had identified more than 15,500 unique e-cigarette flavors available online.⁶ An earlier study of e-cigarette flavors found that among the more than 400 brands available online in 2014, 84% offered fruit flavors and 80% offered candy and dessert flavors.⁷ In addition to the more traditional candy and fruit flavors like mango and mint, e-liquids are also being sold in such kid-friendly options as cotton candy and gummy bear. These products are widely available through convenience stores, other retail outlets and online retailers.

News stories across the country have documented the popularity of flavored e-cigarettes like JUUL across the country. According to one high school student, “It [JUUL] spread like wildfire for two reasons…the first reason is the flashy flavors like crème brûlée. The flavors are responsible for bringing the kids in, the nicotine keeps them.”⁸
Flavored E-Cigarettes Hook Kids

Flavored E-Cigarettes Are Popular Among Youth

Flavors play a major role in youth initiation and continued use of e-cigarettes. Flavors mask the taste of tobacco and make it easier for new users to initiate tobacco use. In addition, many youth perceive flavored tobacco products to be less harmful. The 2016 Surgeon General Report on e-cigarettes concluded that flavors are among the most commonly cited reasons for using e-cigarettes among youth and young adults.

- Data from the 2016-2017 wave of the government’s Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) study found that 70.3% say they use e-cigarettes “because they come in flavors I like.”

- The PATH study also found that 97% of current youth e-cigarette users had used a flavored e-cigarette in the past month.

- The 2019 NYTS found that 57.3% of high school e-cigarette users use mint or menthol flavors, an increase from 31.8% in 2018. Another national survey found that among 10th and 12th grade Juul users, mint is the most popular flavor.

E-Cigarette Use Increases Risk for Smoking

Flavored tobacco products play a key role in enticing new users, particularly kids, to a lifetime of addiction. There is growing concern that use of e-cigarettes may function as a gateway to the use of more dangerous, combustible tobacco products.

- A 2018 report by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) concluded that, “There is substantial evidence that e-cigarette use increases risk of ever using combustible tobacco cigarettes among youth and young adults.”

- A nationally representative analysis found that from 2013 to 2016, youth e-cigarette use was associated with more than four times the odds of trying cigarettes and nearly three times the odds of current cigarette use. The researchers estimate that this translates to over 43,000 current youth cigarette smokers who might not have become smokers without e-cigarettes.

The increase in e-cigarette use is undermining progress in reducing overall use in tobacco use—the recent increase in youth e-cigarette use led to a 59% increase in use of any tobacco product among high school students (from 19.6% in 2017 to 31.2% in 2019).

Health Effects of Flavored E-Cigarettes

Flavored e-cigarettes contain nicotine, the highly addictive chemical that makes it so easy to get hooked on tobacco products and so hard to quit. According to the Surgeon General, “The use of products containing nicotine in any form among youth, including in e-cigarettes, is unsafe.” Flavorings in e-cigarettes can also pose additional health hazards. According to the Surgeon General, “while some of the flavorings used in e-cigarettes are generally recognized as safe for ingestion as food, the health effects of their inhalation are generally unknown” and noted that some of the flavorings found in e-cigarettes have been shown to cause serious lung disease when inhaled. An article in the Journal of the American Medical Association raised concerns that the chemical flavorings found in some e-cigarettes and e-liquids could cause respiratory damage when the e-cigarette aerosol is inhaled deeply into the lungs.
Campbell for Tobacco-Free Kids, February 11, 2020 / Laura Bach


https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6745a5.htm?s_cid=mm6745a5_w. Current use defined as any use in the past month.


