

NEWS

Over 20 percent of US high school seniors vaped marijuana in 2019: study

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The number of teens using marijuana by vaping has increased dramatically in the past two years — with more than 20 percent of US high school seniors reporting the activity this year, according to a study released Wednesday.

In the “Monitoring the Future” study published in the medical journal JAMA, researchers at the University of Michigan found that 21 percent of 12th-graders, 19 percent of 10th-graders and 7 percent of eighth-graders reported vaping THC in the last year.

The spikes in all three grades translate into at least 1 million additional THC vapers in 2019 compared to 2018, according to the survey of more than 42,000 students.

Among seniors, that amounted to a 7.7 percentage-point surge, the second-largest for any substance abuse in the study’s 45-year history.

The largest occurred in 2018, when it reported a 10.9 percentage-point increase in nicotine vaping, which the US Food and Drug Administration called a national epidemic.

“Whatever teens can vape has increased dramatically in the last few years,” study leader Richard Miech told Reuters. Part of that is because vaping devices are easy to hide, while smoking marijuana is much more difficult to conceal, he said.

“Vaping allows teens to get around the policies and procedures put in place to prevent teen drug use,” he said.

Results of the study, which was funded by the National Institutes of Health, are alarming as federal officials continue to investigate lung injuries associated with vaping that **have claimed young lives across the country.**

US officials this week reported four vaping-related deaths, taking the toll to 52 deaths and more than 2,400 who have been hospitalized, according to Reuters. Most of the injuries have occurred in those who vaped THC, the high-producing ingredient in marijuana.

Stanton Glantz, a tobacco control expert at the University of California San Francisco who was not involved in the study, said teens who try vaping nicotine are more likely to vape THC or smoke cigarettes.

“It’s like the Bermuda Triangle of substance abuse. There’s good research out there showing any kid who does any of those is more likely to do the other ones,” Glantz told Reuters.

The study found that the number of 12th-graders who said they had vaped marijuana in the past month doubled from the 2018 survey to 14 percent.

Meanwhile, 12.6 percent of 10th-graders reported vaping THC in the past month, up 5.6 percent, while 3.9 percent of eighth-graders reported vaping THC in the past month, an increase of 1.3 percent.

The study also showed another gain in nicotine vaping, which rose 5.6 percentage points from 2018 to 35 percent of 12th-graders.

Asked why they vape, 60 percent of teens said they wanted to see what it was like, 37 percent said they wanted to relax, and 29 percent said they wanted to feel good or get high.

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Another 8.1 percent said they vaped because they are hooked — a figure that rose 4.5 percent from last year.

The Trump administration has vowed to take action amid the nationwide vaping crisis, as top health officials have been considering whether to ban flavored e-cigarettes to make the products less appealing to kids.

Dr. Nora Volkow, head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, found the results alarming.

Corey Johnson considers running NYC Marathon to quit vaping

“We’ve seen [increases] in the past among the three grades, never at this size that we’re observing with vaping. Never,” **she told CNBC.**

“Teenagers are believing less and less there’s any harm in marijuana, and then on top of that you have sleek, cool devices that actually have become very, very popular among teenagers,” she said.

Volkow also noted that vaping allows people to consume powerful doses of THC without the distinctive smell that smoking marijuana produces.

“When you use marijuana regularly, your risk of becoming addicted is close to 50 percent, particularly if you’re a young person,” she told the news agency.

The daily THC vaping question was added before the practice was linked to the nationwide lung injury outbreak and it remained to be seen whether that will encourage some kids to quit.

But Volkow thinks stories of otherwise healthy teenagers ending up in intensive care may cause teens to “think twice.”

“We predict that’s what will happen,” Volkow said. “We don’t know.”

