
Action on Smoking & Health (Alberta)
Coalition québécoise pour le contrôle du tabac
Manitoba Tobacco Reduction Alliance
New Brunswick Anti-Tobacco Coalition
Newfoundland and Labrador Alliance for the Control of Tobacco
Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco
Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada

MEDIA RELEASE

New statistics showing dramatic spike in vaping among Canadian teens
as well as simultaneous increase of smoking regular cigarettes:

**Tobacco control groups call on all parties
to commit to reversing the damage caused by federal legislation
and worsened by absence of urgently-needed remedies**

Multiple cities, June 20, 2019 – Provincial tobacco control coalitions and physicians’ group are reacting to the devastating results of a new [study published today in the British Medical Journal](#) that shows a dramatic spike in vaping among Canadian teens, coupled with a simultaneous increase in smoking traditional cigarettes.

The health groups are pointing to [Bill S-5](#), adopted a year ago, which legalized the sale as well as the unfettered promotion of electronic cigarettes. Soon after it came into effect in May 2018, a tsunami of promotional activities appeared on [TV](#), on [outside billboards and at point of sale](#), on [subway walls](#), on [Facebook, Instagram and YouTube](#), as well as massive [in-your-face artistic installations](#) and [street events](#) — all of which likely fueled the popularity of the nicotine delivery devices. In fact, the study’s authors say “*the findings should direct attention to regulatory measures that more selectively target these vaping products to adult smokers*”.

*“The onslaught of advertising for these nicotine delivery devices as well as their innocuous appearance (some looking like USB memory sticks, others like slick, colorful modern gadgets) and the array of flavours they come in have without a doubt contributed to their appeal among teenagers”, says **Les Hagen, Executive Director of Action on Smoking & Health (Alberta)**. “When it comes to vaping products, the federal government’s actions have been wholly inadequate. Federal legislators have thrown caution to the wind and made it easy for the vaping industry to attract young people to its highly addictive nicotine products.”*

Authored by **Canada’s** world-renowned expert on smoking and vaping, **University of Waterloo Professor David Hammond**, and a large team of international researchers, the study compares the smoking and vaping habits of 16 to 19 year-olds in **England**, the **US** and **Canada** between July/August 2017 (pre **S-5**) and August/September 2018 (post **S-5**).

<p>The Canadian data reveal a 74% increase in teen vaping - past 30-day use - from 2017 to 2018 (8.4% vs 14.6%), a 79% increase in past-week use (5.2% to 9.3%) and a 71% increase in teens vaping during at least 15 days in the past month (2.1% vs 3.6%). These numbers show sharper increases than those observed in the United States, though the American youth vaping rates remain slightly higher (see table 2 in the study).</p>
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While the **US Surgeon General** referred to the rise in **US** youth vaping as an “**epidemic**”, this study reveals that increases observed in both countries over the same period were overall more dramatic in **Canada** than in the **US** (which saw a 46% increase for past 30-day vaping, 66% for past-week use and 73% for 15+days in last month). In **England**, where promotion and nicotine content are more restricted than in the **US** and **Canada**, researchers found no statistically significant variations.

Most strikingly, the Canadian data indicate a substantial increase in the number of teens who smoke regular cigarettes: a 45% increase in past 30-day smoking (10.7% to 15.5%), 57% increase for past week smoking (7.6% to 11.9%) and 54% for teen smoking during at least 15 days in the past month (4.8% to 7.4%). These statistics point to a reversal of a decades-long trend of decline, say the authors of the paper.

The study is the first to provide insight into the early impacts of the federal legislation that opened the Canadian market to the large players in the vaping industry, which now predominantly include Big Tobacco. Prior to their legalization in 2018, Health Canada’s lack of enforcement allowed consumers to purchase nicotine vaping devices from small business operators with limited capacity to promote their products.

“However, since last May, the large players of the vaping industry have aggressively and openly marketed products through the Internet and other more conventional channels, especially their latest generation of devices that use nicotine salts which generates a much greater dose of nicotine, such as JUUL, VYPE and STLTH,” explains **John McDonald, Executive Director of the Manitoba Tobacco Reduction Alliance**.

“Health Canada falsely reassured parliamentarians and the public about the potential adverse effects of unfettered promotion while it was [clear to tobacco control organizations](#) that the proposed legislation was too permissive and would be a challenge to enforce. And while manufacturers were told not to target kids, everyone with a rudimentary knowledge of the history of the tobacco industry knows how easy it is to attract youth without overtly targeting them. Vaping promotion should not be seen by kids and vaping products should not be appealing to kids, no matter what reassurances are offered by the industry,” adds **Michael Perley, Executive Director of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco**.

The new data confirm anecdotal reports from high school principals, teachers and parents from across Canada that have been sounding the alarm on the emerging phenomenon of teen vaping as well as all the problems associated with the powerful addiction to nicotine, notably students unable to go a day or even a class without vaping. Moreover, the public health community is concerned that vaping could lead to an increase in smoking, a fear that appears to be confirmed by **Professor Hammond’s** research.

*“To make matters worse, **Health Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor** has been aware of this data for [seven months](#). Instead of intervening with urgent legislation to reverse the onslaught of advertising seen by minors, she [launched lengthy and time-consuming consultations](#) regarding possible regulations that would take months if not years before being implemented,”* says **Neil Collishaw, Research Director for Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada (PSC)**. A spokesperson for **Health Canada** recently told media that the [agency had no timelines](#) in mind with respect to its eventual recommendations. *“The failure of this government to respond in a timely manner to this urgent crisis, that is, before the summer break, means that the vaping industry can continue to promote its products unimpeded and that tens of thousands of more kids will get addicted to nicotine over the next school year,”* adds **Mr. Collishaw**.

*“The issue is not about being for or against vaping products,” notes **Flory Doucas, spokesperson and co-director of the Quebec Coalition for Tobacco Control.** “Smokers should be able to access any product that helps them quit. But the government’s current lackadaisical approach has caused much collateral damage. Indeed, the numbers show that teen smoking has increased some 50%, amounting to tens of thousands¹ of new young regular smokers and vapers, precisely the type of scenario that continues to fuel the tobacco epidemic and industry profits, which are patently rooted in the powerful addiction to nicotine.”*

A [recent Leger poll](#) shows that 86% of Canadians believe that the government should apply the same advertising restrictions to vaping products as it does to tobacco. *“The Health Minister’s call on the provinces to step in is a disingenuous tactic that passes the buck to jurisdictions that did not cause this problem. If our federal parliamentarians really care about the health of our teenagers, they would pledge to bring in legislative measures on an urgent basis to severely limit advertising and retail promotion as soon as Parliament resumes after the next election”, concludes **Ms. Doucas.***

- 30 -

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¹ Hammond *et al.* (2019) report that among 16-19 yr-olds, 15+ days per month smoking went from 4.8% to 7.4% from 2017 to 2018 - a 2.6 percentage point increase and 15+ days per month vaping went from 2.1% to 3.6% - a 1.5 percentage point increase in the same period. While not an exact match for the age group of the Hammond study, the [CTADS 2017 survey](#) estimates that there were 2,023,000 **15-19** year-olds in 2017 (as opposed to 16-19 year-old). In a comparable population estimate, a 2.6% increase would translate to (2,023,000 *2.6%) to 52 598 additional young smokers and a 1.5% increase (2,023,000 *1.5%) would translate to 30 345 additional young vapers.