



CITY OF  
Northglenn



Image Source: 2019 Northglenn Vaping Study

# Vaping Study – Executive Summary

January 2020

## Background

This executive summary summarizes research carried out on behalf of the City of Northglenn, with significant support from Northglenn Youth Commission and Northglenn HEAL Committee, to explore the perspectives of youth and parents as it relates to electronic smoking devices (ESDs) and vaping, including potential new regulations being put forth to Northglenn City Council. Using Girl Effect's unique peer-to-peer research tool [TEGA](#), Rocky Mountain Cradle to Career Partnership ([RMC2C](#)) gathered insights to support City of Northglenn in obtaining a greater understanding of youth and parent perspectives around vaping within the community, as well as to substantiate aspects of the particular regulations being put forth to City Council. These regulations included possibly implementing a licensing process for retailers of non-smokable tobacco and raising the purchasing age for tobacco products to 21 – which has since been federally mandated.

## Methodology

To do so, TEGA conducted 42 qualitative interviews with 32 youth ages 11 to 21 years old, and 10 parents of youth ages 5-21. Specifically, the research explored the types of electronic smoking devices (ESDs) youth are using and at what frequency, how they're obtaining ESDs, their level of knowledge about the health risks, which outcomes most motivate them, how they feel about potential policy changes, and finally what types of information and resources would best inform their decision making regarding the risks and ramifications of vaping.

Youth Category	Description	
Never Vaped 10	These youth have never tried vaping, no matter the product.	
Tried Vaping 14	These youth have tried vaping but no longer use any products.	
Currently Vape 8	These youth are currently still using vape products.	

Of the youth, **8 currently vape, 14 have tried vaping but no longer do so, and 10 had never vaped.** Parents were predominantly those who **had perspectives of vaping but had assumed their youth did not vape (with the exception of two parents).**

Youth self-identified which ESDs they were currently using or have used. This is labelled in this summary as follows:

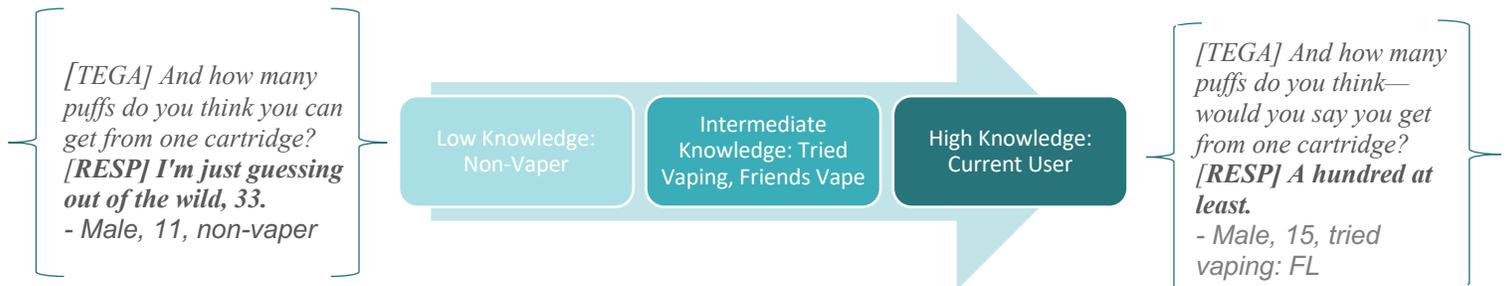
**NIC:** nicotine concentrate liquid  
**MJ:** marijuana concentrate liquid  
**FL:** flavored vape liquid that does not contain nicotine or marijuana

The key findings from the research are broken down into a primary consumer buying cycle, outline the steps a youth embarks on as they choose to abstain or engage in vaping: awareness, consideration, intent, purchase, and re-purchase.



## Insights – Awareness

This study found that youth who *don't* vape maintain low knowledge of the products available due to lack of interaction with devices or conversations about their use, yet they are aware and knowledgeable of the cultural phenomena and some associated terminology (e.g. dragon breath). Youth who *have* tried vaping or *currently* vape tend to be more submerged in the online culture of vaping and maintain a higher awareness of the current messaging present there, as well as knowledge of ESD functions and access.



Awareness of the health implications associated with nicotine are much more widespread amongst all youth, but knowledge of the health repercussions beyond the effects of nicotine remains low, for both youth and parents alike. While many of them were aware of news stories highlighting several traumatic incidences associated with ESDs, **more than half of the youth, and the majority of parents, hold the perception that there is a lack of publicly available research on how vaping impacts one's physical health.**

## Insights – Consideration

**Social context, mental health, and stress coping each play an instrumental role in motivating youth to engage or abstain from vaping.** In fact, social acceptance and coping with stress were the primary drivers for youth who have tried or continue to vape. Health and addiction seem to be more motivating considerations for non-vapers and those who tried vaping, more so than current users. At a minor level treating one's self to owning a vape, trying a flavor, or getting a buzz can motivate some youth, but this is not an overarching driver.

*“Not addiction, rejection. Like, when you're around your friends, you kind of want to look cool or you want to try to fit in. So, I feel if you don't do it - do what everybody else is doing, they're gonna, like, think badly of you. And say that, like, you're scared or, like, you're not, like, don't know how to have fun.”*  
- Female, 15, current vaper: NIC



**24 of 32 youth** told TEGA they believe youth who vape “want to seem cool” or that “I thought it would make me cool”.

**Concern for the mental health of their peers is a common sentiment of youth and was prevalent in multiple narratives.**

*“Some people I know kind of rely on vape products to feel better instead of actually getting help.”*

- Female, 15, current vaper: NIC

**When TEGA asked youth which repercussions they worried most about, they ranked addiction and fines at the top of the list, followed by damage to physical health, legal trouble, and school punishment.** However, when the data is disaggregated to remove non-users, concern about fines moves to the top of the list of concerns and school punishment jumps ahead of damage to physical health.

Punishment and negative repercussions related to legal recourse, parents and school (including extracurriculars) do seem to hold some weight with all youth. However, punishments of this nature only seem to deter youth who are at lower risk of continued use.

An unexpected spike, as not many youths mentioned this concern in follow-up questions, was regarding the impact of ESDs on the environment, which ranked above losing extra-curricular activities *and* damage to mental health. Also, interestingly, rejection by peers was ranked lowest, even though youth told TEGAs time and again that social availability, encouragement, and peer pressure were highly influential in their use patterns.



Created by UNICORN from Noun Project

## Insights – Intent

Some youth believe that vaping is a replacement for cigarettes, others say that ESDs are not a replacement but rather are **the “new cigarette” because youth aren’t smoking traditional cigarettes anymore.** The majority of parents see it as holding the same meaning and fulfilling the same need states (e.g. sociality and coping) as cigarettes, but not as a replacement because youth prefer not to smell and want to avoid stigmas associated with cigarettes. In short, some see ESDs as a substitute for cigarettes and others see ESDs as a cultural replacement.

Similarly, youth who do not vape held a common story about how vaping was unacceptable among their friends. These youth described their ability to surround themselves with friends who share their convictions.



Created by Annette Spithoven from Noun Project

This study found that it is common for youth to seek out ESDs that *don’t* contain nicotine. “Juice only” ESDs are the most common products for a youth to try and buy, followed by ESDs with nicotine. Use and frequency vary depending on the setting in which the youth is vaping.

Where do you or your friends typically vape?	Count	
Parks/Outside/Skate Parks	22	
Bathroom/Locker Room	18	
Home/Backyard/Bedroom	14	
Car	6	
Class	5	
Other Places at School	3	
Hotel	1	
Party	1	
Work	1	

Youth predominantly use or see others use ESDs in outdoor spaces, with the exception of at school, where youth are mainly using in bathrooms and in some cases the classroom.

Youth are primarily focused on securing locations with minimal adult oversight.

*Just kind of like really anywhere moderately secluded ... just in my car sitting out in the parking lot, or like walking around, going to, like, the parks.*

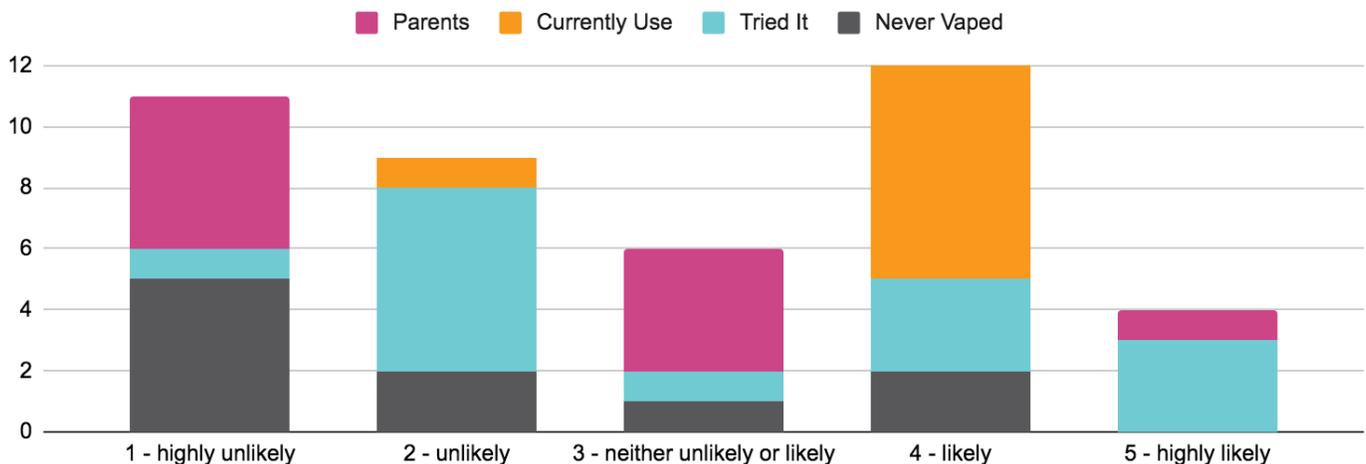
– Male, 17,  
Current: MJ, FL

Youth acknowledge that age is definitely a factor in their access to ESDs. **Changing the legal purchase age to 21 would do two things, according to youth: allow for some maturity in decision making around purchasing for people who are underage and reduce the number of access points and visibility in school** because older students wouldn't have direct access or the ability to re-distribute in schools. However, almost all students say that 'if there is a will there is a way,' meaning

access won't be cut off completely. Parents shared youths' sentiments and felt that an age increase would only *slightly* limit or curb usage amongst youth.

**Nearly half of respondents interviewed, 15 of 32 youth respondents, felt that it was either *likely or highly likely* that they knew an adult who would purchase products for them.** While the majority of parents thought it was highly *unlikely* someone they know over 21 who would buy for a youth, they explained that youth know or will find adults to purchase for them, or they will go online to order ESDs, sighting the same sentiment as youth – ‘where there is a will there is a way,’ particularly for youth who might already be addicted.

### Likelihood of knowing someone 21+ who would purchase products for someone underage



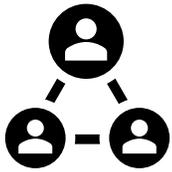
## Insights – Purchase

In moving from consideration, to intent, to purchase, youth develop an understanding how vaping impacts their finances. Thus, **many who either currently vape or have tried it talk about the practice of sharing or trading and other ways they access vapes**, which is not always through the exchange of money. It seems that cost and disposability of certain ESD brands, such as JUUL, NJoy, or Novo, are a part of the appeal that turns a youth's consideration into intent and finally a purchase.

**50%**

**of youth respondents who have either tried or currently vape say they get their products from an individual who has legally bought it in a store and resold it to them.**





**The data found that sometimes the individuals from whom youth acquire ESDs are family members, including parents.** Store bought ESDs are frequently purchased by older family members, and sometimes a peer's parent or other family member as these are trusted, legal ways for family and peers to access ESDs. Youth in turn, share, trade, or resell these ESDs in their social networks. This reveals the distribution patterns within the youth community.

Additionally, distance from school did not spark much discussion or consideration from youth, mainly because many youth access ESDs from peers or family members who are legally of age, and not from stores themselves. Therefore, **the distance of a retail outlet from a school is less important than the distance from residences or the stores that are accessible on a student's route to and from home and school.**



Compared to youths, parents had more assuredness that regulating retailer licensing and location would decrease youth access, compared to raising the minimum buying age to 21.

Lastly, **online access is an important consideration as this study reveals that only youth who have tried or youth who currently vape are aware of online access and purchase points.** Furthermore, lying about age online is easy for youth, and two youth also brought up social selling/reselling sites as places to purchase.



## Recommendations

When youth and parents were given the opportunity to share what they wanted the City of Northglenn to know and which ways they thought would be best to help them be informed about vaping, both youth and parents came up with a number of different ideas and suggestions; ranging from more research about the health implications, to relevant and applicable legal ramifications, and greater support of youth's ability to cope with mental health and wellness. Readers should refer to the recommendations included at the end of the full report for a complete breakdown or contact RMC2C for more details.

For more information contact Emily Clarendon at  
[EmilyClarendon@rme2c.org](mailto:EmilyClarendon@rme2c.org)

*This summary was prepared by:*

Emily Clarendon, MSc | RMC2C Senior Director of Community Engagement  
Kassandra Neiss, MA | Girl Effect Research Coordinator

*With contributions by:*

Jacqueline Meyer | RMC2C VISTA Community Engagement Coordinator  
Sarah Hughes | TEGA Adams County, Colorado  
Isabel Rodriguez Favela | TEGA Adams County, Colorado  
Megan Madden | TEGA Adams County, Colorado