

# Vaping: An insight into children and young people in Brighton & Hove

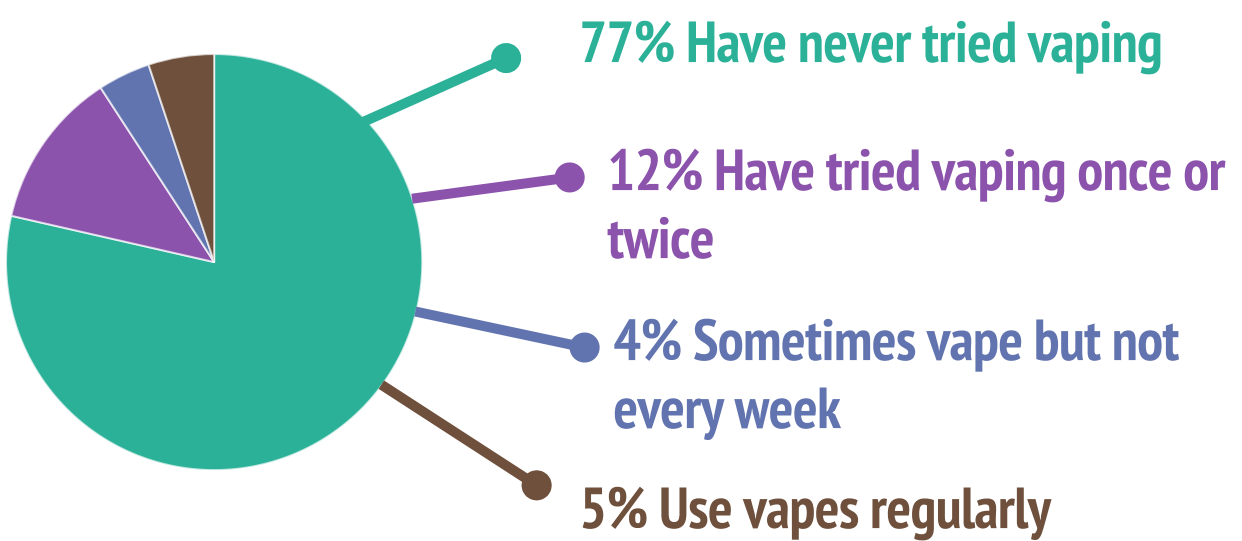


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## Introduction

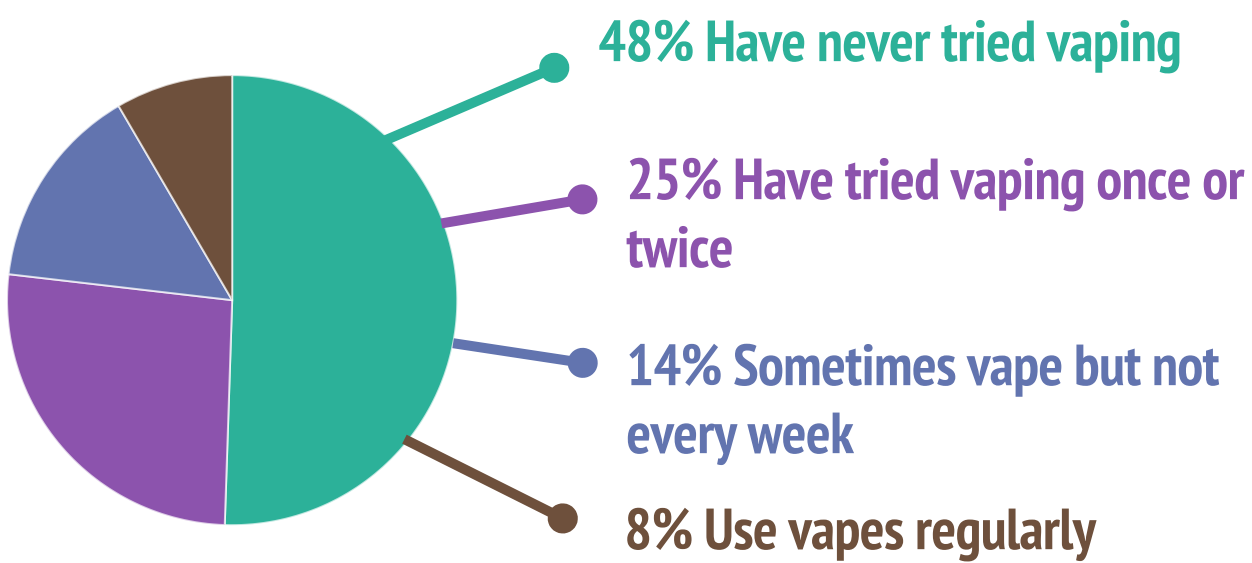
This briefing combines data from the Safe and Well at School Survey (SAWSS) with findings from 2 focus groups with secondary-aged pupils. The SAWSS is completed every 2 years and asks primary, secondary and further education (FE) students several health and wellbeing questions. One of the topics asked of secondary and FE students was surrounding their use of vapes. The below data indicates the prevalence of vaping in children and young people.

### Secondary pupils age 11-16



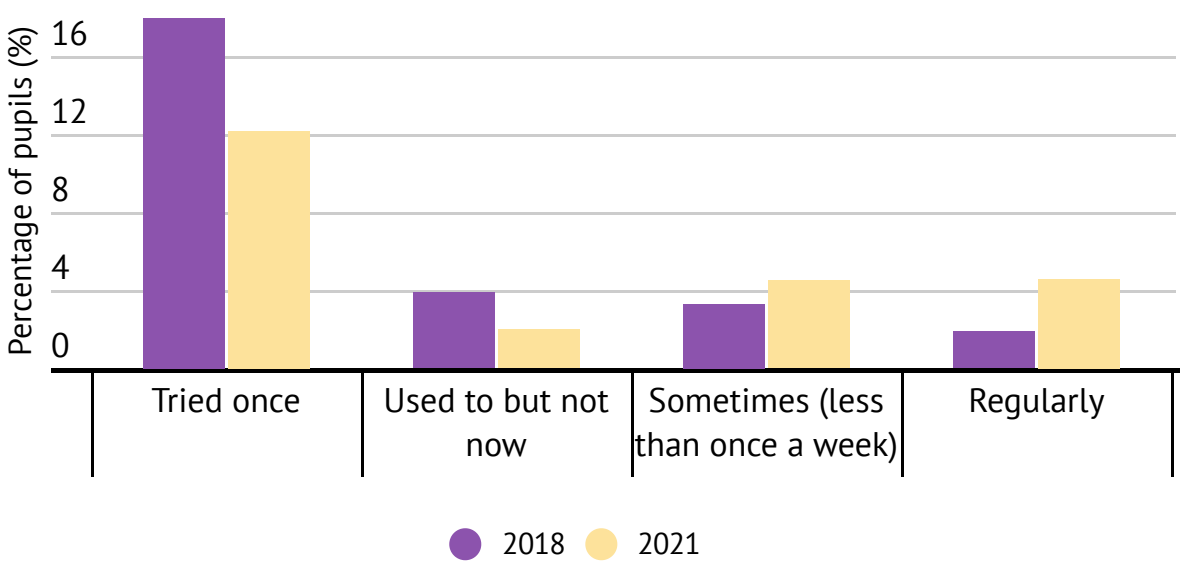
Total no. of pupils: 7191

### Further Education (FE) pupils age 16-18

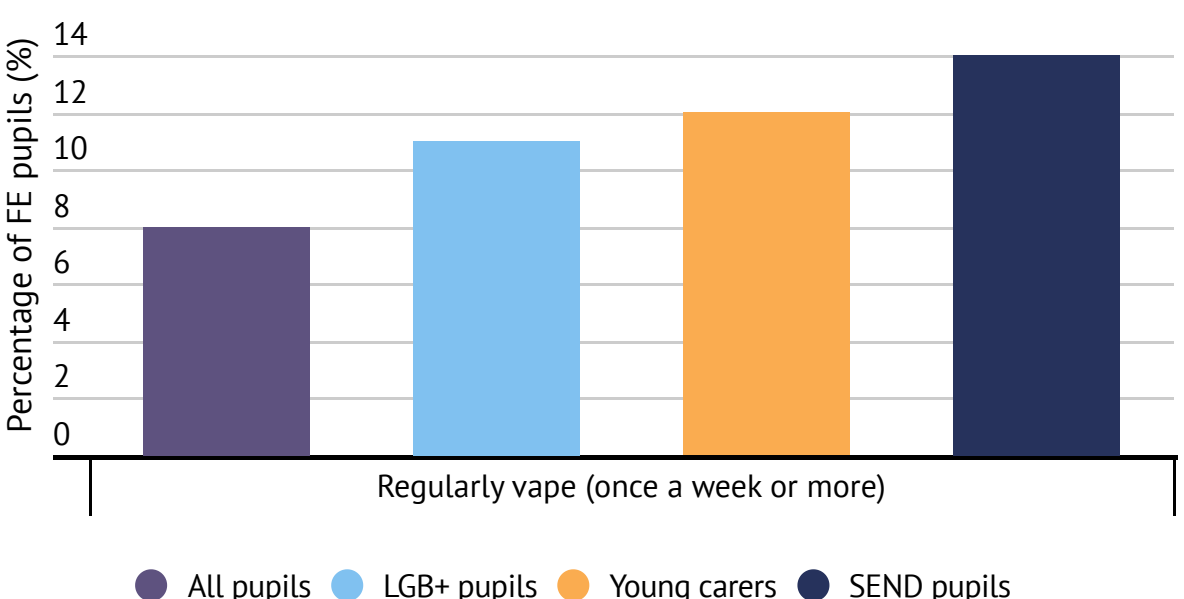


Total no. of pupils: 2792

### Trend data - secondary



### Vulnerable groups



# What children and young people have to say about vaping

## Focus Groups

In February 2023, 2 focus groups were undertaken by 2 secondary schools with pupils who had either already been identified as using vapes regularly or at risk of doing so. The aims were to understand why pupils vape, how they get access to vapes, perceptions of the health implications and awareness of advertisements.

### Why do you use vapes?

Many pupils referred to liking the different tastes and colours "It tasted like I was eating watermelon". One pupil said they first tried a vape when they were in year 7. The group felt vapes are now more appealing and are often targeted towards children and young people. Pupils often referred to the positive feelings and emotions that vaping provided. The words "calm" and "relaxing" were referenced frequently. However, it was recognised these feelings can lead to addiction. One pupil said they experience "shakes and anxieties if they don't vape" and another pupil said "If I don't vape for 5 hours then I feel more pissed off. Furthermore, one student referred to it becoming a habit "I don't think about how it makes me feel. I just do it out of habit". Some pupils also commented that they did it out of boredom and it can help fulfil a sugar craving.

### Do you think vapes are safe and better than cigarettes?

The majority of pupils said no they don't think they are safe citing the uncertainty around what they contain and the long term health effects. The majority of pupils at one school thought vaping was worse or just as bad as smoking cigarettes. However, the majority of pupils from the other school, thought smoking was worse. One pupil commented, "The liquid from the vapes doesn't run out, it just goes into your lungs instead". Another pupil said they "heard the resin gets stuck in the lungs". Pupils were aware of potential breathing issues such as popcorn lung and expressed concern about seeing people on breathing machines. One pupil even took a deep breath and highlighted a rattle they have and how this worried them. Pupils were aware some vapes contained higher amounts of nicotine "I swear one elf bar is 200 cigarettes".

### Where do you get your vapes from?

Several pupils said they got their vapes from family members by either being given them or stealing them. Others said they got them from other students. For example, one student said, "Some people buy them, use them, recharge them and then sell them for a tenner". Multiple students said certain shops in town sold them to pupils in school uniforms. Shopkeepers would often take cash and ask them to put it in their pockets before leaving. It was also mentioned that shopkeepers often overcharge underage customers for vapes. In general, pupils mentioned disposable vapes are much cheaper and easier to get hold of.

### Do you have control over whether or not you vape?

Several pupils referred to addiction and said they often "don't feel in control because they often vape anyway, even if they don't want to like it's a habit". When asked if they wanted to quit, some said yes whereas others said not yet. One student said they could give up easily, but when asked if they had spoken to the school nurse, they said "No, maybe I can't give up actually". One pupils reasoning for quitting was the cost as they were previously spending £25 per week.

### Do you think people feel pressured to vape?

Some students said they felt peer pressure doesn't exist and that in this situation, it's more of a want to try it rather than pressure. However, they did mention they usually start vaping if their friends do. Pupils who felt in control of their vaping felt that most people start because everyone else does it but it then becomes an independent habit.

### Where do you see e-cigarette advertisements?

Some students said they had seen advertisements on TikTok promoting The melody bar. One pupil commented, "I have seen that on Tik Tok, apparently it is legal for children and it is just lavender". The facilitator asked about TikTok's challenges. Some pupils referred to a trend known as "blinker on a train". A pupil described this as "doing an average hit with a THC vape followed by a 10-second hit and making it flash". Some pupils said they recognised that the colours and flavours of vapes are branded for children and some will even buy vapes to match their trainers or clothes. However, some said although they had seen advertisements, they were more influenced by the people around them.

# Summary

It is clear from the survey statistics that the prevalence of pupils who vape either occasionally or regularly is high, particularly among the 16-18 cohort. Within this age group, you were more likely to have tried a vape than not. Considering you must be 18 to purchase a vape this raises concerns about the illegal selling of vapes by shopkeepers and older pupils.

The trend data highlights that whilst fewer pupils are trying e-cigarettes, pupils were more likely to sometimes or regularly vape in 2021 than they were in 2018. Young carers, SEND pupils and LGB+ Pupils were more likely to vape compared with all pupils.

From the focus groups it is clear that whilst some pupils are aware vaping can have health implications, there is a lack of awareness around what a vape contains and the long-term effects. We know from wider research there has been a significant rise in the number of counterfeit vapes in circulation. Non-compliant vape products are also associated with non-compliant sales often to underage customers. This raises certain questions:

- Are pupils aware that there is a significant number of counterfeit vapes in circulation?
- Do pupils know how to spot a non-compliant vape?
- Do pupils know what a vape contains?

From the focus groups and wider research, it is clear that there are numerous social media advertisements and online challenges that influence children and young people's vaping habits. The variety of fruit flavours available is also targeted towards young people. The Government is proposing to ban fruit-flavoured vapes which would be a positive development. However, more still needs to be done to highlight to pupils and their parents and carers that it is illegal to sell an vape to anyone under the age of 18.

We know that nicotine is an addictive substance. Within the focus groups, pupils mentioned having access to vapes that contained above the legal limit of 2% strength. This feeds into the theme of addiction which was raised throughout both focus groups. Whilst some pupils had the belief they could stop, when asked how long they could last without one, the answer was often only a few hours.

Finally, it was mentioned that due to being cheaper and more accessible, pupils are more likely to purchase a disposable vape. We know that there are significant environmental concerns surrounding disposable vapes with approximately 1.3 million thrown away in the UK each week. This offers an opportunity to educate and engage our children and young people around these effects and drive forward ambitions to be a healthier and more sustainable city.

## Recommendations

1. More work needs to be done with trading standards to reduce the illegal selling and purchasing of vapes. This includes THC vapes which are illegal for both children and adults.
2. There needs to be greater education about the health implications of vaping and awareness of counterfeit vapes. However, we need to combine this with consistent messaging which highlights whilst it is still better to vape than smoke cigarettes, children should not be doing either.
3. There is a lack of current service provision to support pupils who are addicted to vaping which needs to be explored further.
4. It needs to be acknowledged that vulnerable groups are more likely to vape. This needs to be acknowledged when offering support for addiction as there will often be additional vulnerabilities that need to be considered.
5. The environmental impact of disposable vapes needs to be highlighted and explained to pupils.

Please email [ph.schools@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:ph.schools@brighton-hove.gov.uk) if you have any questions or comments regarding this briefing.