

# Vaping is still on the rise in high schools

*Federal regulators could move to limit mint flavors after study shows its popularity*

By [Justine Calma@justcalma](#) Nov 5, 2019, 9:00am EST

One in four high schoolers and one in ten middle schoolers have tried vaping in the last 30 days, according to the [2019 National Youth Tobacco Survey](#) released today. The survey results come as both states and the federal government have called for stricter regulations to stem the rising number of young people who use e-cigarettes. But current efforts may be falling short by continuing to allow mint and menthol flavors to be easily accessible. [Another study](#), published today in the same journal, found that mint was the most popular flavor for Juul users in eighth through 12th grade.

## A GIGANTIC LEAP

The numbers, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* suggest that there are now 4.1 million high schoolers using electronic cigarettes, about a half million more than [the year before](#). And it's a gigantic leap from five years ago, when just [4.5 percent of high school students reported vaping](#). Vaping became more popular than smoking cigarettes among students for the first time [in 2014](#). There's also been an uptick in how often the students are vaping. More than one in three of those who vape said that they've done so at least 20 days out of the past 30 days. That number was closer to [one in four last year](#). The study authors note, however, that it's more difficult to compare this year's numbers to previous years because of changes to the questionnaire that reflect the changing brands on the market. And this was the first year that the survey was conducted electronically instead of using paper and pencil, which likewise makes the results tricky to compare to other years.

The popularity of mint could affect how federal authorities regulate e-cigarette flavors. Previous efforts to curb vaping among young people focused on banning sweeter flavors while allowing flavors like mint and menthol to stay on the shelves. Those flavors, along with tobacco, were thought to attract older users.

## THE POPULARITY OF MINT COULD AFFECT HOW AUTHORITIES REGULATE E-CIGARETTE FLAVORS

The National Youth Tobacco Survey included 19,000 students; it's conducted each year by the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration to get an estimate of tobacco product use nationwide and to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention programs. [After last year's survey](#), the FDA said it would move to stop vendors from selling sweet-flavored e-cigarette products unless they kept minors out of their stores. But those limitations didn't apply to tobacco, mint, and menthol flavors. At the time, then-FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb said that he was still worried about mint, [writing that](#) "if evidence shows that kids' use of mint or menthol e-cigarettes isn't declining, I'll revisit this aspect of the current compliance policy."

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/11/5/20948684/vaping-high-school-students-fda-cdc-flavor-ban>

The flavor study that was conducted by the University of Southern California included 14,000 eighth, 10th, and 12th graders who use Juul products, the most widely used e-cigarette brand. The high school students voted mint as their go-to flavor, while middle schoolers ranked it second after mango. One in ten middle schoolers vape, according to the tobacco survey.

President Trump in September [called on the FDA to ban all flavored cigarettes](#). “Not only is it a problem overall, but really specifically with respect for children,” he told reporters at the White House. Earlier that month, [Michigan became the first state to ban them](#).

#### A TOUGH TIME FOR THE E-CIGARETTE INDUSTRY

The new numbers come at a tough time for the e-cigarette industry. Juul, a giant in the industry, [halted advertising and replaced its CEO](#) in September, and last month a former executive [accused the company of shipping contaminated pods](#). Public scrutiny is also growing over vaping as the FDA and CDC continue to investigate a spate of mysterious [lung injuries connected to vaping](#) that have led to 37 deaths. It’s a serious concern, but it is separate from the rising numbers of young people using e-cigarette products. The vast majority of those reported injuries have been linked to people using substances containing THC, not nicotine.