



GOVERNMENT & POLITICS


HEALTH

## ALASKA IN BRIEF

# A quarter of Alaska adults use tobacco products, and vaping is common among youth, report says

BY: YERETH ROSEN - MAY 15, 2024 6:17 PM



 An Anchorage store selling a variety of tobacco and electronic cigarette products is seen on April 14, 2023. Cigarette smoking has decreased over the past decades in Alaska, but youth use of electronic vaping products has increased, according to an annual report from the state's Tobacco Prevention and Control Program. (Photo by Yereth Rosen/Alaska Beacon)

Alaska adults' tobacco use has been unchanged at 25% since 2014, even though they are smoking far fewer cigarettes than they used to, and youth use of electronic cigarettes is high and enabled by friends, adults and online opportunities, according to a newly released [report](#) from the Alaska Division of Public Health.

The 2023 Tobacco Facts Update, released by the division's [Tobacco Prevention and Control Program](#), details trends going as far back as the 1990s.

While a quarter of all Alaska adults reported that they used tobacco products in 2021, different patterns are emerging according to socioeconomic status, geography and other factors, the new report said.

By geography, Anchorage had the lowest rate, at 20%, while northern and Southwest Alaska had the highest rates, at 45% and 44% respectively.

Tobacco use of all types is more prevalent among Alaska Natives than non-Natives, but there is evidence that the gap has narrowed a bit.

In 2014, 50% of Alaska Native adults and 21% of non-Native adults used tobacco products, the report said. By 2021, the rate for Native adults fell to 43% while

the rage for non-Native adults was unchanged over that period.

Alaskans' cigarette use has declined steadily over the past decades, from 128.6 packs sold per person in 1996 to 39.4 packs sold per person in 2021, said the report, which relies on data from the Alaska Department of Revenue's tax division.

But the use of smokeless tobacco of all types remained constant statewide at 6% over the past 10 years. The statistics include [iqmik](#), a potent combination of tobacco and fungus ashes that is [widely used](#) in the Yup'ik regions of Western Alaska.

Among youth, cigarette smoking has become rare but use of electronic vapor products, known as vaping, has become common.

Rates of youth smoking had dropped to 8% in 2019 from 37% in 1995. But use of electronic cigarettes rose from 18% in 2015 – the first year that metric was tracked – to 26% in 2019.

That compares to adult rates for vaping, which at 6% in 2021 was little changed from the 7% reported in 2015.

Nearly half – 46% – of Alaska high school students reported trying an electronic vapor product at least once, the report said. That compares to 36% in 2015, the report said.

Youth who use electronic cigarettes reported relying on social connections to obtain the products. The 2019 data revealed that 45% borrowed or “bummed” them, 14% gave money to other people to buy them and 8% were given the products by adults. Another 8% reported obtaining the products online.

The data about high school students in the new report is from the 2019 [Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), a system of anonymous questionnaires sponsored by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Normally, the surveys are conducted every other year. But the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with that schedule.

The survey was conducted in the 2022-23 school year, and data from that is expected to be available later this year, the tobacco report said.

The report was released as the Legislature was [considering a bill](#) intended to reduce youth use of electronic cigarettes.

The measure, [Senate Bill 89](#), is sponsored by Senate President Gary Stevens, R-Kodiak. As originally drafted, the bill would have imposed the first statewide tax on electronic cigarette products, as well as setting the minimum age for purchases to 21 from 19, the age currently in state law. However, the tax provisions were stripped out of the bill in the state House.



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