

INFORMATION ON VAPING FOR TEACHERS

PREVENTING VAPING USE IN STUDENTS

INTENDED AUDIENCE:

This resource is designed primarily for educators working with students in Grades 6–9 (approximately ages 11–14). It may be adapted for use in nicotine prevention with older students.

School-age years are an important time to help young people understand the risks of vaping and build the skills they need to make healthy choices. As an educator, you can play a pivotal role in providing students with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about vaping and other nicotine products.



WHAT TO KNOW

Vaping has become very common among young people in Canada:

- **29% of youth (grades 7-12) in Canada have tried vaping at least once**
- **In British Columbia, about 1 in 4 youth have tried vaping**
- **Most common age youth try vaping: 13**
- **Use of vaping products increases with grade level, with Grade 12s reporting the most use**

WAYS YOU CAN HELP PREVENT VAPING AMONG YOUR STUDENTS:

- Understand why youth start vaping
- Recognize who may be at higher risk
- Talk openly and calmly about the health risks
- Support students in building refusal and coping skills
- Use consistent, clear anti-vaping messages in your classroom



WHY DO YOUTH TRY VAPING?

Many young people try vaping before they fully understand the risks. The decision to vape can be motivated by their emotions, curiosity, social pressure, or the perceived benefits of vaping.

A range of social, emotional, and environmental factors can shape a young person's likelihood of trying vaping, including:

YOUTH-ORIENTED MARKETING & PACKAGING

The tobacco and vaping industry uses youth-oriented marketing, candy-like flavours, and fun, toy-like packaging to foster curiosity and reduce perceived harmfulness of vaping among youth. Social media, celebrities and influencers may portray vaping in a positive light while downplaying its risks.

CURIOSITY & EXPERIMENTATION

Some students vape because they're bored, curious, or want to experiment and take risks, which are common feelings during youth brain development.



SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT & PEER INFLUENCE

Youth are more likely to try vaping if their friends or family vape or view vaping as normal and acceptable.

STRESS & POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Adolescents experiencing bullying, depressive symptoms, school absence, threats, or other stressors have higher odds of trying vaping.

PERCEIVED HARMLESSNESS

Youth who don't fully understand how vaping affects their health or think that they won't get addicted are more likely to try vaping than those who understand the risks.



IDENTIFYING STUDENTS AT HIGHER RISK

Some youth face added pressures that may increase their chance of trying vaping. These can be social, emotional, cultural, or related to learning needs.

Youth who may be at higher risk of trying vaping include:

- Gender-diverse and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Youth experiencing challenges with their mental wellbeing (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- Youth experiencing behavioural or self-regulation challenges such as impulsivity or aggression
- Indigenous youth, who may face additional systemic and community stressors
- Youth with disabilities or chronic health conditions
- Youth who are disengaged at school or struggling academically

HEALTH RISKS OF VAPING FOR YOUTH

NICOTINE ADDICTION

Nicotine is highly addictive and youth can become addicted more quickly because their brains are still developing. Experimentation in adolescence can lead to lifelong nicotine addiction.

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Nicotine use in children and youth may contribute to or worsen mood disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety) and behavioural issues (e.g., impulse control).

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Nicotine use in adolescence can disrupt cognitive function and permanently alter the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, and memory.

LONG-TERM HEALTH

Vaping products are still relatively new and long-term effects are still being studied. We know that vaping may increase the risk of chronic lung diseases, heart disease, and lung and oral cancers.

GATEWAY EFFECT

Vaping may increase the likelihood of using other nicotine or tobacco products later (dual use), especially among youth.

RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS

Vaping can cause coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath, affecting physical activity and overall health.



[Read more about the health risks of vaping here.](#)

DEBUNKING COMMON MYTHS ABOUT VAPING

Youth who understand the risks of vaping are less likely to experiment with or get hooked on vaping. Educate your students about common myths they may have heard about vaping. Short, calm responses can help you feel more confident when students bring up vaping.

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU COULD SAY...

"Everyone at school is vaping."

"It might feel that way, but most students actually are not vaping. A lot of young people are choosing to stay vape-free for their health and their future."

"Vaping helps me with stress."

"It can feel like that in the moment, but nicotine actually makes stress worse over time. Let's talk about some other ways to handle stress that don't harm your body."

"It's safer than smoking, so it's not a big deal."

"Vaping might be less harmful than smoking, but that doesn't mean it's safe. Nicotine and other chemicals in vapes can have long-term health effects. This is especially risky for young people whose brains and lungs are still developing."

"It's just flavours; mine doesn't have nicotine."

"Some vapes that say 'no nicotine' actually have nicotine or other chemicals. Even without nicotine, other chemicals in the aerosol can still irritate and damage your lungs."

✘ WHAT NOT TO DO

Keep conversations supportive and trauma-informed and try to avoid:

- Shaming or blaming students for experimenting with or using nicotine
- Using scare tactics that exaggerate risks, which can cause students to tune out
- Making assumptions about who vapes based on appearance, grades, or friend groups
- Focusing only on punishment instead of support, education, and problem-solving
- Talking about youth who vape as "bad kids," which can increase stigma and reduce trust

Instead, focus on listening, validating feelings, sharing accurate information, and helping students explore healthier choices.

EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION



The following strategies can help students stay vape-free and support those who may already be using vaping products.

1 PROMOTE HEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS

Encourage students to find healthy ways to manage stress and mood. Emphasize that it's a myth that vaping helps with stress relief and remind students that substance use will not help them manage stress. In your classroom, normalize talking about emotions and seeking support.

Healthy coping mechanisms could include:

- Mindfulness and relaxation, e.g., journaling, yoga, reading, or listening to music
- Physical activity, e.g., playing a sport, dancing, or taking a walk outside
- Creative outlets, e.g., drawing, painting, writing, or playing an instrument
- Building a support system, e.g., spending time with friends or talking to a trusted adult

→ QuitNow's [Coping Skills page](#) has useful tips and a printable workbook with ideas for managing stress without vaping. Consider integrating mindfulness exercises or movement breaks into your classroom to help students learn to cope with stress.

2 BUILD CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Help students analyze and question the messages they receive about vaping and other nicotine products. De-normalize the vaping content that youth are seeing on social media and in their social environments.

- Recognize that “safer” does not mean “safe”. Vaping might be safer than smoking, but that does not mean that vaping is safe, especially for kids whose brains and bodies are still developing.
- Use class discussions or small-group activities to identify students' positive beliefs about vaping (e.g., “It calms me,” “It’s cool”), then compare them with scientific evidence.
- Investigate the marketing strategies of the tobacco and vaping industry and how they are designed to influence attitudes and behaviors. Have students analyze actual vape ads (or youth-oriented packaging) and deconstruct the persuasive tactics (flavours, imagery, peer association, health claims).

→ [This resource from Behind the Haze](#) can help you discuss the industry's influence with your students.

→ [BC Lung Vaping Health Education Toolkit](#)

3 PRACTICE REFUSAL SKILLS

Help students build confidence in saying “no” when they feel pressured.

- Brainstorm different ways to turn down a vape, e.g., using humor, being direct, or changing the subject.
- Role-play everyday situations for practice, such as being offered a vape at a party, in the school washroom, or by an older student.
- Teach short “if-then” plans (“If someone offers me, I [say X, walk away, change subject]”).
- Reinforce that saying “no” is a skill that grows stronger with practice.

- This [activity sheet from Not An Experiment](#) and [video from the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association](#) walk through developing refusal skills.
- Our [youth mini-site](#) also has a youth-friendly page on saying no to vaping.



4 FOSTER AUTONOMY AND DECISION-MAKING

Help students feel empowered to make healthy choices and help their peers do the same. Key messages could include:

- “You have the power to care for your health and your future.”
- “You are in control of your choices, even when others around you vape.”
- “You have the right to feel safe and comfortable in your body and your space.”
- “It’s okay to walk away from a situation that doesn’t feel right.”
- “Your ‘no’ is enough—you don’t have to explain or prove anything.”

- This [slide deck from CATCH My Breath](#) helps you walk students through healthy decision-making.
- [This video from the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association](#) also promotes discussion around healthy decision-making and peer influence.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This document includes all external web pages and videos referenced in this resource, as well as additional links for learning more about supporting students in staying vape-free.

- [See Resource List](#)



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