



**GENERATION  
VAPE**

A research collaboration project



In partnership with  
**Cancer  
Council**

# Turning the Tide on NSW Teen Vaping

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Generation Vape would like to acknowledge the following partners

Research partners

**The Daffodil Centre**



Federal partner



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## Introduction

Australia's vape legislation, introduced in April 2024, restricts the sale of all vapes (e-cigarettes), whether they contain nicotine or not, to pharmacies only. These laws have been fully implemented since October 2024.

The adoption of the pharmacy-only framework was the culmination of a series of reforms that included ending the importation of all non-prescription vapes and a total ban on all disposable vapes. The vapes now sold in pharmacies must adhere to strict standards around packaging, nicotine concentration, device specifications, and can only include tobacco and mint/menthol flavours.

In the state of New South Wales (NSW), these regulatory changes have been accompanied by education and curriculum materials explaining the contents and health impacts of vape products, digital social marketing campaigns featuring the real stories of young people harmed by vaping,<sup>1</sup> and the launch of vaping cessation supports, including the quit vaping app, *Pave*.<sup>2</sup>

The primary goal of the changes to vaping products laws was to protect young people from taking up vaping. These policy reforms were driven by evidence that young people could easily access vapes, that vape use rates among young never smokers had rapidly increased, and that young people described vape use as both common amongst their peers and socially acceptable.<sup>3</sup> Limiting vape sales to pharmacies helps ensure that people who wish to use vapes to quit smoking can still access these products, while also preventing such ready access to teens who have never smoked.

The aim of this report is to assess changes in vape use, access, and perceptions amongst teens from NSW since these legislative changes.

## Methods

The Generation Vape research project includes online cross-sectional surveys at 6-monthly intervals examining vaping attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviours. From September 2021 the research project has included a NSW sample of young people aged 14-17.<sup>4</sup> This short report presents survey findings from Wave 6 (April 2024, the wave immediately prior to changes in the national laws) through Wave 9 (October 2025). In response to tobacco industry product development, survey questions were also added in Wave 7 (October 2024) to capture nicotine pouch product use. All data for Wave 7, 8 and 9 were collected following the 01 October 2024 national legislation changes requiring all vapes to be sold behind the counter from pharmacies.

Ethical approval for the study was received by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Sydney (reference number 2021/442). Informed consent was provided by both parents and participants to take part in the research after receiving a detailed Participant Information Statement.

## Results

### Product Use

Table 1 presents vaping behaviour among 14–17-year-olds across Wave 6 (April 2024), Wave 7 (October 2024), Wave 8 (April 2025), and Wave 9 (October 2025). Statistically significant changes in vaping were observed among teens in NSW ( $p < 0.001$ ). In Wave 6, 71.4% of 14–17-year-olds reported never having vaped (not even a few puffs), with higher proportions in Wave 7 (77.8%), Wave 8 (76.2%), and Wave 9 (79.9%). In addition, experimental use declined with the proportion who had tried only a few puffs decreasing from 12.0% in Wave 6 to 8.3% in Wave 9. Summing “never” plus “few puffs” categories, the proportion who had either never vaped or only tried a few puffs increased from 83.4% in Wave 6 to 88.2% in Wave 9, underscoring a shift away from more regular use. The proportion who had vaped 100 or more times also fell from 6.4% in Wave 6 to 4.1% in Wave 7 and 2.6% in Wave 9.

**Table 1: Have you ever used a vape?**

% of all young people reporting ever having used a vape^					
	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	
Number of respondents (n)	n=716	n=700	n=698	n=711	p-value
Never-vaper	71.4%	77.8%	76.2%	79.9%	<0.001
A few puffs	12.0%	9.2%	10.9%	8.3%	
<10 occasions^^	4.7%	3.5%	6.6%	6.1%	
10 to <100 occasions	5.5%	5.4%	3.1%	3.1%	
100+ occasions	6.4%	4.1%	3.2%	2.6%	

For all Tables:

^ Percentages are weighted for gender, remoteness and age of the 2021 Australian population

\* p is test of differences between waves, adjusted for sex, age, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, remoteness, SES, and language spoken at home.

^^does not include those who only had a few puffs

Smoking patterns among teens in NSW remained largely stable ( $p = 0.399$ ). The proportion who had never smoked rose from 88.8% in Wave 6 to 91.3% in Wave 9. The proportion who had tried only a few puffs decreased slightly from 5.0% in Wave 6 to 3.6% in Wave 9. Summing “never” plus “few puffs” categories, the proportion who had either never smoked or only tried a few puffs remained consistently high, increasing from 93.8% in Wave 6 to 94.9% in Wave 9. Those reporting having smoked 100 or more cigarettes remained low, declining slightly from 1.1% in Wave 6 to 0.2% in Wave 9.

**Table 2: Have you ever smoked cigarettes or other tobacco products?**

% of all young people reporting ever smoked^					
	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	
Number of respondents (n)	n=716	n=700	n=698	n=711	p-value
Never-smoker	88.8%	89.0%	88.9%	91.3%	0.399
A few puffs	5.0%	5.7%	5.9%	3.6%	
<10 cigarettes^^	3.1%	2.2%	2.5%	2.3%	
10 to <100 cigarettes	2.0%	2.5%	2.2%	2.6%	
100+ cigarettes	1.1%	0.7%	0.5%	0.2%	

Use of oral nicotine pouches such as Zyn or Velo remained very low among 14–17-year-olds, with no statistically significant differences between Waves 7, 8 and 9 ( $p = 0.784$ ) (Table 3). Across the three waves, 96-97% of participants reported never using these products, with 2% or fewer indicated ever use or being unsure.

**Table 3: Have you ever used an oral nicotine pouch, such as Zyn or Velo?**

% of all young people reporting ever having ever used an oral nicotine pouch^					
	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	
Number of respondents (n)	Q not asked	n=700	n=698	n=711	p-value
Yes	-	2.4%	1.6%	2.2%	0.784
No	-	96.0%	97.1%	95.8%	
I don't know/unsure	-	1.6%	1.3%	2.0%	

## Product access

Around one-third of ever-vapers who had taken more than a few puffs reported buying their last vape themselves, with this figure decreasing, from 40.0% in Wave 6 to 20.4% in Wave 9—but this was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.172$ ) (Table 4). The majority of participants continued to report not purchasing their last vape themselves across all waves.

**Table 4: Did you buy the vape yourself?**

% of young people who have ever-vaped^^ reporting purchasing their own vape					
	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	
Number of respondents (n)	n=123	n=90	n=90	n=82	p-value
Yes	40.0%	31.4%	26.5%	20.4%	0.172
No	60.0%	68.6%	73.5%	79.6%	

Among ever-vapers who have had more than a few puffs, a significant global p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ) indicated that perceptions of how easy it is to access vapes shifted between waves (Table 5). The proportion reporting it was very easy to get a vape decreased, from 52.7% in Wave 6 to 39.1% in Wave 9. Despite this decline, the majority still described access as easy or very easy, with little change in reports of moderate or high difficulty. Overall, while ease of access may have declined slightly following law changes, most ever-vapers continued to report relatively few barriers to obtaining vapes.

**Table 5: How easy or hard is it for you to get a vape? (Asked of ever-vapers who have had more than a few puffs)**

% of young who have ever-vaped^^ reporting ease of access to vapes					
	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	
Number of respondents (n)	n=123	n=90	n=90	n=82	p-value
Very easy	52.7%	41.1%	39.5%	39.1%	<0.001
Easy	17.6%	23.2%	23.1%	22.6%	
Quite easy	13.7%	19.1%	20.8%	22.9%	
Neither easy or hard	7.7%	10.6%	10.7%	8.5%	
Quite hard	3.3%	6.0%	4.9%	6.9%	
Hard	3.8%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	
Very hard	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	

## Social norms and health beliefs

There was a statistically significant decline in the belief that vaping is common among peers, with the proportion believing this falling from 61% in Wave 6 to 48% in Wave 9 ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 6). This suggests a reduced perception of peer vaping prevalence across waves.

**Table 6: How common is it for people your age to vape?**

How common young people believe vaping is amongst peers (all young people)^					
	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	
Number of respondents (n)	n=716	n=700	n=698	n=711	p-value
How common is it for people your age to vape?~	61%	55%	50%	48%	<0.001

^ % who think its common (vs not common and neutral)

Beliefs about vaping among 14-17-year-olds remained stable across waves, with no statistically significant changes for any statements except one (Table 7). Agreement with negative statements such as vapes are unsafe to use, can harm the developing brain, can damage the lungs, and cause addiction during adolescence remained consistently high (proportions consistently above 70%), indicating strong awareness of risks. Beliefs about vapes being healthier than cigarettes or helpful for quitting smoking remained low and unchanged, while agreement with the statement nicotine is harmless significantly decreased from 11% in wave 6 to 8% in wave 7 and 6% in wave 8 before rising again to 10% in wave 9 ( $p = 0.002$ ).

**Table 7: How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about vapes**

Level of agreement with harms and benefits of vaping (all young people)^					
Statement/question**	Wave 6	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	
<b>Number of respondents (n)</b>	n=716	n=700	n=698	n=711	p-value
Vapes are unsafe to use	80%	83%	83%	81%	0.191
Vaping can harm the developing brain	82%	82%	83%	81%	0.947
Vaping can damage the lungs	89%	88%	87%	87%	0.512
Vaping during adolescence can cause addiction	86%	88%	88%	84%	0.191
It is unsafe to use vapes around others	72%	74%	74%	73%	0.943
A prescription from a doctor is needed to buy a nicotine vape	48%	47%	48%	45%	0.817
Vapes are healthier than smoking tobacco cigarettes	24%	22%	26%	24%	0.810
Vapes help smokers to quit	27%	25%	24%	23%	0.281
Nicotine is harmless	11%	8%	6%	10%	0.002

^ % who agree (ie strongly agree or agree) vs neutral, disagree or strongly disagree

## Discussion and policy implications

Efforts to curb teen vaping are delivering encouraging results. In October 2025, 88.2% of NSW teens who participated in the Generation Vape study reported little (only a few puffs) or no experience with vapes, compared to 83.4% in April 2024. The number of teens who have ever vaped (including just a few puffs) has declined from 29.6% in April 2024 to 20.1% in October 2025, a relative drop of 32% in just 18 months. The comprehensive approach to vaping control adopted in NSW, including implementation of the national laws limiting vape sales to pharmacies only, paired with education materials, media campaigns, and quit supports, appears to be positively impacting the health of young people.

Encouragingly, many young people in NSW are knowledgeable about the harms of vaping and increasingly disagree that nicotine is harmless. The social acceptability of vaping also seems to be weakening, with fewer young people in NSW perceiving that vaping is very common among their peers. Sustaining education efforts and impactful media campaigns is essential to further strengthening and cementing these beliefs as protective factors against vaping uptake.

While promising progress has been made, vape product access continues to be very easy for NSW teens. Greater focus on effective and coordinated government enforcement of pharmacy-only sales is needed to maximise and accelerate the public health impact of the vaping reforms.

Smoking rates remain relatively stable, with 5.1% of teens who participated in the Generation Vape study having smoked more than a few puffs in Wave 9, compared to 6.2% in wave 6. Given the devastating health consequences of continued smoking, decreasing smoking rates and preventing smoking uptake amongst NSW teens must remain a public health priority. Nicotine pouch use in this age group is currently very low, at

around 2%, however as was the case with vaping, this figure could quickly escalate if the ban on retail sales is not well enforced.

Strengthening and proactively enforcing the new tobacco retail licensing laws that were introduced in NSW in 2025 is key to limiting access to both vape and tobacco products. In future, expanding the remit of this licensing scheme to reduce the number of tobacco retailers in the state could both further limit illicit product access and align with community expectations.<sup>5</sup>

NSW's comprehensive approach to vaping control is positively impacting on the health of young people. Continued investment in enforcement, education, and cessation support will help to maintain momentum and safeguard the health of young people.

## Citation

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