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# Assessing the impacts of Australia's vape laws on parents and teachers: early positive indicators

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# Assessing the impacts of Australia's new vape laws on parents and teachers: early positive indicators

## Introduction

In February 2025, we published a short report that assessed the early impacts of the 2024 Australian vaping legislation on adolescents aged 14-17 years.<sup>1</sup> The aim of [this](#) short report is to assess the vaping perceptions, knowledge, and behaviours of Australian parents and teachers and to offer early insights on any changes and emerging trends following the vaping legislation reforms. Parents and teachers are important role models for adolescents during a critical time of development when a variety of health behaviours are initiated and established.<sup>2</sup> We provide topline measures describing parent and teacher vape use, their agreement with the harms of vaping, and support for vaping laws. We also report on teachers' observations of adolescent vaping at school and how often they confiscate vaping products.

Australian law prohibits the sale of all vapes, including those that do not contain nicotine, outside of pharmacies. From 1 July 2021 to 31 September 2024, a prescription was required to access any vape from a pharmacy. From 1 October 2024, all vapes (containing 20ml of nicotine or less) should be available as behind-the-counter sales in pharmacies only, where state and territory laws allow. Under the legislation, adolescents under 18 years still require a prescription to legally access vapes, again only where state and territory laws allow. Further to this, vaping products can only be sold in tobacco and menthol/mint flavour and are required to meet specific quality standards.

The legislation aims to close the 'non-nicotine vape loophole' that enabled retailers to sell mislabelled, illegal nicotine vapes and fuelled the dramatic rise in adolescent vaping.<sup>3</sup> It will protect young people from vape/tobacco industry exploitation, while maintaining legal access to vapes for the small number of people who use vapes to quit smoking. These vape access laws are also part of a broader regulatory approach that prohibits the importation and sale of any disposable vaping products and includes mass media campaigns educating young people about the health harms of vaping.<sup>4</sup>

With a great deal of global variation in how vapes are regulated<sup>5</sup>, focusing on Australia's unique approach to regulating vapes will not only be of interest to local and national stakeholders, but internationally our findings can provide indicators towards addressing adolescent vaping rates.

## Methods

The Generation Vape research project includes online cross-sectional surveys at 6-monthly intervals examining vaping attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviours. From February 2022 (Wave 2), the research project has included a national sample of parents and teachers of young people aged 14-17 years (Wave 1 was NSW participants only).<sup>6</sup> This short report presents survey findings from Wave 2 (February 2022) to Wave 7 (November 2024). All data for Wave 7 was collected following the 1 October 2024 national legislation changes requiring 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 all participants to take part in the research after receiving a detailed Participant Information Statement.

## Findings

### Vape frequency and intensity

The proportion of parents who reported being a 'non-vaper' increased gradually but significantly across waves (Table 1;  $p < 0.001$ ). In Wave 7, 87.4% of parents reported being a non-vaper, the highest level observed across all waves.

**Table 1: Vape frequency reported by parents**

% of all parents reporting ever having used a vape <sup>^</sup>								
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7		
Number of respondents (n)	n=3601	n=2136	n=2113	n=1710	n=2544	n=1873	p-value* (p1)	p-value* (p2)
Non-vaper <sup>^^</sup>	84.2%	85.2%	86.0%	87.1%	86.3%	87.4%	<0.001	0.383
Less than monthly	2.3%	2.6%	4.2%	1.5%	2.7%	2.0%		
At least monthly	2.6%	2.0%	1.7%	1.4%	1.9%	1.6%		
At least weekly	5.1%	4.3%	3.4%	4.6%	3.9%	4.1%		
Daily	5.8%	5.8%	4.6%	5.4%	5.2%	4.8%		

For all tables:

<sup>^</sup> Percentages are weighted for gender, state, remoteness and age of the 2016 and 2021 Australian populations (waves 1-4 and waves 5-7 respectively).

<sup>^^</sup> Non-vaper includes those who never vaped, formerly vaped, and had tried only a few puffs.

\* p1 tests differences in proportions or means across all 7 waves, adjusted for sex, age, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, remoteness, SES, and language spoken at home. p2 tests differences between wave 7 and wave 6, using the same adjustments.

The proportion of teachers who reported being a 'non-vaper' was high and consistent over time (Table 2), with the exception of Wave 4 (83.9%). Although there was significant variation across waves ( $p < 0.001$ ), this appears to be driven by the lower proportion of non-vapers in Wave 4 (with no apparent reason for this anomaly).

**Table 2: Vape frequency reported by teachers**

% of all teachers reporting ever having used a vape <sup>^</sup>								
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7		
Number of respondents (n)	n=533	n=371	n=351	n=265	n=469	n=308	p-value* (p1)	p-value* (p2)
Non-vaper <sup>^^</sup>	93.2%	94.8%	83.9%	93.1%	93.9%	94.8%	<0.001	0.664
Less than monthly	3.5%	2.1%	8.6%	1.4%	2.4%	1.6%		
At least monthly	1.2%	1.8%	2.6%	1.5%	0.6%	0.7%		
At least weekly	0.7%	1.0%	0.9%	1.9%	1.0%	0.3%		
Daily	1.5%	0.4%	4.0%	2.1%	2.1%	2.6%		

## Agreement with harms of vaping

Parents who agreed or strongly agreed with all six statements about the harms of vaping tended to increase from Waves 2-5 and remained steady thereafter (Table 3). In contrast, there was decreasing agreement to the statements about vapes being healthier than tobacco cigarettes ( $p < 0.001$ ) and as a helpful smoking cessation aid ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 3: Parent agreement with the harms of vaping**

% of all parents who either agree or strongly agree with statements about vapes/vaping								
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7		
Number of respondents (n)	n=3601	n=2136	n=2113	n=1710	n=2544	n=1873	p-value* (p1)	p-value* (p2)
<b>Negative statements about vaping</b>								
Vapes are unsafe to use	80%	84%	86%	87%	87%	87%	<0.001	0.784
Vaping can harm the developing brain	81%	84%	84%	87%	87%	86%	<0.001	0.973
Vaping can damage the lungs	86%	90%	92%	93%	92%	92%	<0.001	0.165
Vaping during adolescence can cause addiction	89%	91%	93%	93%	93%	93%	<0.001	0.553
It is unsafe to use vapes around others	72%	77%	77%	79%	78%	77%	<0.001	0.535
A prescription from a doctor is needed to buy a nicotine vape	43%	45%	47%	53%	57%	57%	<0.001	0.412
<b>Positive statements about vaping</b>								
Vapes are healthier than smoking tobacco cigarettes	22%	19%	17%	16%	14%	14%	<0.001	0.608
Vapes help smokers to quit	25%	22%	22%	21%	21%	18%	<0.001	0.033
Nicotine is harmless	9%	9%	8%	7%	9%	7%	0.425	0.080

The proportion of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed about the harms of vaping was consistently high across Waves 2-7 ( $\geq 90\%$  for all six negative statements about vaping, Table 4). Significant changes were observed for the statement about vapes being unsafe around others (although the change was non-linear;  $p = 0.001$ ). There was a significant increase in agreement with the statement about needing a prescription to access a vape ( $p < 0.001$ ). For Wave 7 in particular, almost all agreed on the harms of vaping in relation to causing addiction in adolescents (99%) and damaging the lungs (98%). Few agreed with the positive statements about vaping, with only 3% endorsing that nicotine is harmless.

**Table 4: Teacher agreement with the harms of vaping**

% of all teachers who either agree or strongly agree with statements about vapes/vaping								
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7		
Number of respondents (n)	n=533	n=371	n=351	n=256	n=469	n=308	p-value* (p1)	p-value* (p2)
<b>Negative statements about vaping</b>								
Vapes are unsafe to use	90%	93%	92%	93%	91%	93%	0.182	0.107
Vaping can harm the developing brain	90%	90%	89%	95%	93%	95%	0.118	0.146
Vaping can damage the lungs	93%	96%	94%	98%	96%	98%	0.179	0.312

Vaping during adolescence can cause addiction	95%	95%	96%	98%	97%	99%	0.104	0.171
It is unsafe to use vapes around others	83%	75%	81%	81%	84%	82%	0.001	0.713
A prescription from a doctor is needed to buy a nicotine vape	37%	39%	45%	44%	55%	58%	<0.001	0.542
<b>Positive statements about vaping</b>								
Vapes are healthier than smoking tobacco cigarettes	18%	12%	17%	9%	14%	12%	0.028	0.435
Vapes help smokers to quit	20%	24%	23%	17%	21%	19%	0.140	0.509
Nicotine is harmless	3%	3%	5%	8%	5%	3%	0.407	0.726

## Support for vaping policy

The vast majority of parents strongly supported, supported or were neutral about vaping policies in Wave 7 (Table 5). Prohibiting vaping in areas where smoking tobacco is prohibited was supported by 96% of parents, banning vape flavourings by 94% of parents, and restricting vape sales to pharmacies by 90% of parents.

**Table 5: Parent support of vaping policies**

% of parents that support or do not oppose <sup>#</sup> vaping policies	
	Wave 7 <sup>&amp;</sup>
Number of respondents (n)	n=1873
Not being allowed to vape in areas where you cannot smoke tobacco	96%
Banning vape flavourings (such as candy, dessert and fruit flavourings)	94%
Restricting the sale of vapes to pharmacies only	90%

<sup>#</sup> % who strongly support, support or are neutral towards policy measures.

<sup>&</sup> Commenced question at wave 7.

Almost all teachers strongly supported, supported or were neutral about vaping policies in Wave 7 (Table 6). Prohibiting vaping in areas where smoking tobacco is prohibited was supported by 97% of teachers, banning vape flavourings by 96% of teachers, and restricting the vape sales to pharmacies by 91% of teachers.

**Table 6: Teacher support of vaping policies**

% of teachers that support or do not oppose <sup>#</sup> vaping policies	
	Wave 7 <sup>&amp;</sup>
Number of respondents (n)	n=308
Not being allowed to vape in areas where you cannot smoke tobacco	97%
Banning vape flavourings (such as candy, dessert and fruit flavourings)	96%
Restricting the sale of vapes to pharmacies only	91%

## Vaping and the school context

The proportion of teachers who were aware of students using or attempting to use vapes on school grounds in the last six months across waves is reported in Table 7. There were significant changes in the proportion of teachers who reported never being aware of vape use at school across waves, although the pattern was non-linear: 19.3% in Wave 2, which decreased to 6.6% in Wave 5 and increased to 16.3% in Wave 7 ( $p<0.001$ ). The difference in the proportion of teachers never aware of vape use at school significantly increased between Waves 6 (11.9%) and 7 (16.3%,  $p=0.014$ ).

Teachers who reported being aware of vape use at school five times or more a week significantly varied from Wave 2 (9.8%) to a peak in Wave 5 (27.1%,  $p < 0.001$ ), declining in Wave 6 (19.1%) and again in Wave 7 (10.9%,  $p = 0.014$ ).

**Table 7: Teacher awareness of vape us on school grounds**

% of all teachers aware of students using or attempting to use vapes on school grounds								
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7		
Number of respondents (n)	n=533	n=371	n=351	n=256	n=469	n=308	p-value* (p1)	p-value* (p2)
Never	19.3%	12.9%	11.3%	6.6%	11.9%	16.3%	<0.001	0.014
Less than once a week	34.9%	26.4%	27.4%	22.0%	28.6%	35.6%		
Two or three times a week	27.1%	31.0%	28.0%	34.8%	31.7%	26.6%		
Four or five times a week	8.9%	6.6%	8.8%	9.5%	8.7%	10.7%		
> Five times a week	9.8%	23.1%	24.6%	27.1%	19.1%	10.9%		

The proportion of teachers who reported confiscating vaping products from students in the last 6 months is presented in Table 8. The pattern of confiscating vaping products from students two or more times a week increased from Wave 2 to Wave 5 followed by a decrease in Waves 6 and 7. For example, 18.8% of teachers reported confiscating vaping products two to three times a week in Wave 2, 29.4% in Wave 5 and 17.6% in Wave 7, and 3.4% reported confiscating vaping products five or more times a week in Wave 2, 10.8% in Wave 5 and 5.2% in Wave 7 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 8: Teacher confiscation of vaping products from students**

% of all teachers who have confiscated vaping products from students in the last 6 months								
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6	Wave 7		
Number of respondents (n)	n=533	n=371	n=351	n=256	n=469	n=308	p-value* (p1)	p-value* (p2)
Never	30.0%	22.7%	18.6%	14.2%	20.3%	23.3%	<0.001	0.118
Less than once a week	40.8%	39.8%	39.3%	37.9%	43.5%	50.8%		
Two or three times a week	18.8%	23.0%	27.8%	29.4%	24.7%	17.6%		
Four or five times a week	7.0%	7.7%	8.7%	7.8%	5.2%	3.1%		
> Five times a week	3.4%	6.9%	5.5%	10.8%	6.3%	5.2%		

## Discussion

Vaping among both parents and teachers has continued to decrease, with less than 6% of teachers and 13% of parents reporting ever vaping themselves. This aligns with the decrease in vaping among adolescent participants in the Generation Vape survey.<sup>1</sup> Teacher awareness of vaping at school and confiscating vapes from students at school appears to have peaked in Waves 4 and 5 of the survey (data collected in 2023) and is now returning to levels seen at the beginning of the study in 2022. This could reflect actual decreases in adolescent vaping overall, or just that vaping during school hours is becoming somewhat less of an issue. These are encouraging, early positive signals but ensuring that these trends continue is critical.

While teachers have always had very high knowledge of the harms of vaping, parental knowledge has increased with significantly more agreeing that vapes are unsafe to use, vaping can harm the developing brain, vaping can damage the lungs and cause addiction in young people, and that vaping around others is unsafe. This high knowledge of harms is reflected in the very high levels of parent and teacher support for laws that protect young people from easily accessing vaping products. Parents and teachers are essential allies in reducing adolescent vaping and engaging them in vaping prevention efforts should be a priority. Their high levels of support for laws that restrict the sale of vapes to pharmacies only is a very strong indicator of the ongoing need for enforcement action that holds retailers accountable for illicit vape sales.

## Policy implications

To both maximise the benefits of the pharmacy only vape access laws and the high levels of community support for these laws, strong, well-resourced and regular enforcement efforts need to be prioritised. This high-level support could be jeopardised if vapes remain readily available from retailers and if retailers are not penalised for selling illicit vaping products.

There are now strong levels of understanding and awareness of the health harms of vaping across both parents and teachers. While education through both curriculum support for teachers and public campaigns has likely contributed to this increase in knowledge, it is essential that a comprehensive approach is maintained. The combination of the regulatory approach, enforcement and education is key to ensuring that these early positive signs of reduced awareness of vaping on school grounds are to be maintained.

Globally, adolescent vaping continues to rise, and several nations are debating what course of action will prevent increasing uptake. Australia's unique regulatory approach requires ongoing investment in monitoring and evaluation that will be of growing interest internationally.

## Citation

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