



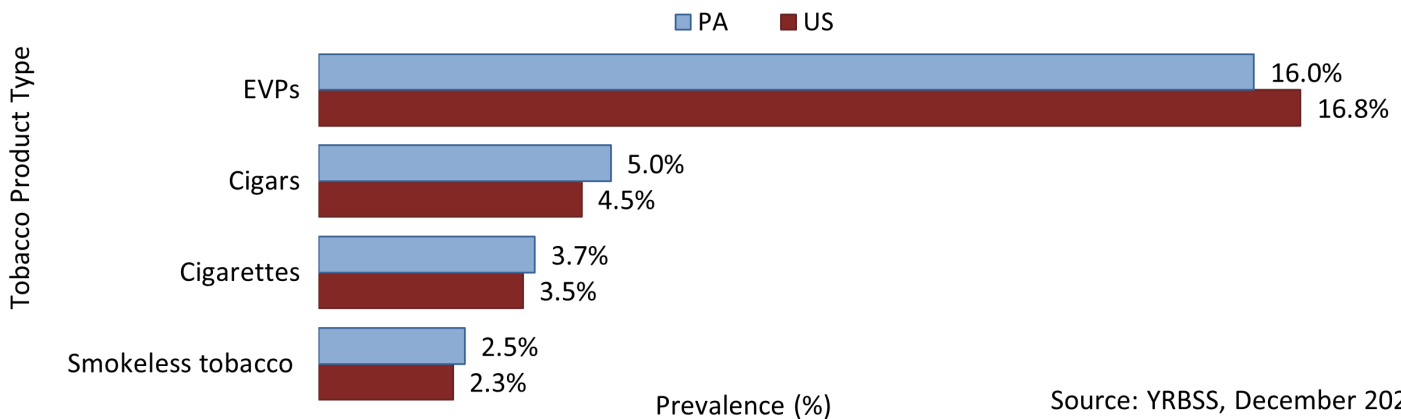
## BACKGROUND

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death in the United States. It is a public health concern as youth initiation of tobacco use commonly continues into adulthood and leads to an increased dependency on nicotine.<sup>1</sup> This factsheet describes tobacco use among high school students in Pennsylvania based on the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) data.<sup>2</sup>

## WHO DOES THE ISSUE IMPACT?

Approximately one out of six Pennsylvania high school students currently used tobacco products, including electronic vapor products (EVPs, 16.0%), cigars (including little cigars and cigarettos, 5.0%), cigarettes (3.7%), and smokeless tobacco products (3.4%) in 2023. Current use is defined as using a tobacco product at least once in the thirty days prior to survey administration. Pennsylvania’s prevalence rates were comparable to national prevalence rates. The prevalence of EVP use, commonly referred to as vaping, was four times higher than the cigarette smoking prevalence in Pennsylvania high school students in 2023 [Figure 1].

**Figure 1. Prevalence of Tobacco Use (%) by Tobacco Product Type, PA and US YRBSS, 2023**



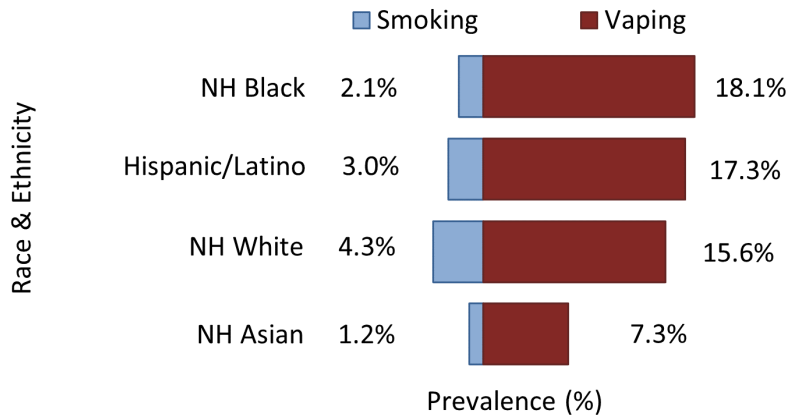
For cigarette smoking, the prevalence was 4.7% among male high school students and 2.7% among female high school students in Pennsylvania. By race and ethnicity, the smoking prevalence was 4.3% among non-Hispanic (NH) white students, 3.0% among Hispanic/Latino, 2.1% among NH Black, and 1.2% among NH Asian students [Figure 2]. Smoking prevalence by grade was highest in 12<sup>th</sup> graders (7.9%) and lowest in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders (2.1%) [Figure 3].

Contrary to the cigarette smoking prevalence, the vaping prevalence was higher among female than among male high school students (18.1% vs 14.1%) in Pennsylvania. NH Black students had the highest vaping prevalence (18.1%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (17.3%), NH white (15.6%), and NH Asian students (7.3%) [Figure 2]. Vaping was higher among the upper grade levels, with one-quarter of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reporting using EVPs [Figure 3]. In 2023, 33.7% of high school students reported trying vaping and 15.5% reported trying cigarette smoking at least once in their lifetime. 14.6% of high school students reported purchasing EVPs themselves at retail outlets.

1. CDC. Office on Smoking and Health. 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/about/osh/index.htm>  
2. CDC. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

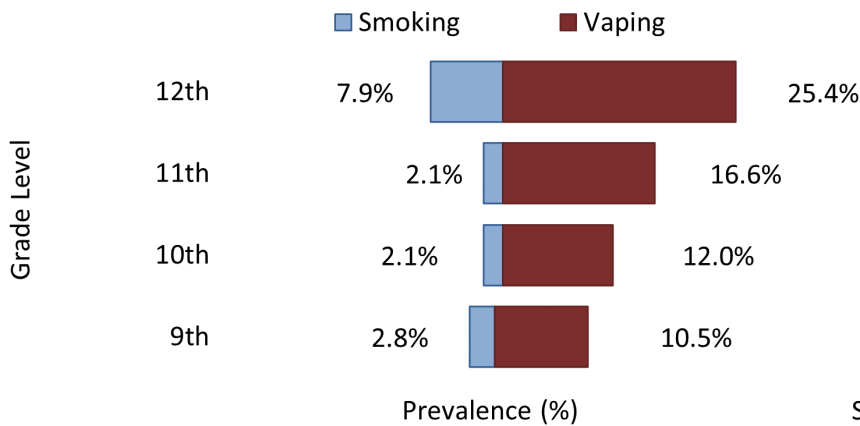


**Figure 2. Smoking vs Vaping Prevalence (%) by Race & Ethnicity, PA YRBSS, 2023**



Source: YRBSS, December 2024.

**Figure 3. Smoking vs Vaping Prevalence (%) by Grade Level, PA YRBSS, 2023**



Source: YRBSS, December 2024.

Limitations exist in the presented data. The data is restricted to only youth attending high school. Homeschooled or youth out of school due to homelessness, incarceration, or drop-out are not included. Youth in some of those situations may have increased health risk behaviors. Additionally, surveyed high school students may under or overreport health risk behaviors leading to unreliable results.

## WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The Pennsylvania Department of Health, Division of Tobacco Prevention and Control (DTPC), collaborates with community partners and stakeholders to implement a strategic plan for reducing tobacco-associated morbidity and mortality in the Commonwealth.<sup>3</sup> The strategic plan aligns with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs and includes the following goals:<sup>4</sup>

3. PA DOH DTPC. *Strategic Plan 2023-2027*. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Programs/Tobacco/PA%20Tobacco%20Strategic%20Plan%202023-2027.pdf>  
 4. CDC. *Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs*. 2014. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/stateandcommunity/guides/pdfs/2014/comprehensive.pdf>



- Prevent initiation of all tobacco product use among youth and young adults
- Promote quitting among adults and youth
- Eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke
- Advance health equity by identifying and eliminating commercial tobacco product-related inequalities and disparities

DTPC supports multiple statewide and regional youth initiatives including the Tobacco Resistance Unit (TRU) statewide coalition. TRU youth are educated on the dangers of tobacco use and vaping, learn about resources for cessation, and advocate for policies and programs to prevent youth initiation of tobacco products. DTPC also enforces tobacco retailer laws in the Commonwealth to prevent tobacco sales to people under the age of 21 years.

## RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Pennsylvania Department of Health, Division of Tobacco Prevention and Control:  
<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/tobacco/pages/tobacco.aspx>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Office on Smoking and Health:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/index.html>
- Pennsylvania Tobacco Quitline for Youth - My Life, My Quit Program:  
<https://pa.mylifemyquit.org/>