

Underage tobacco use falls despite cigarette strength, CDC finds

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Here's some good news in an otherwise troublesome year: Kids aren't turning to tobacco as often, even shunning the popular e-cigarettes, and that started even before the U.S. quarantines and lockdowns.

The number of middle- and high-school students who use tobacco products fell 28% in 2020 to about 4.5 million, according to a new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention using survey data collected from Jan. 16 to March 16. The declines were driven largely by lower use of e-cigarettes, cigars and smokeless tobacco products.

Underage tobacco use is a central issue for [cigarette makers](#) as well as [e-cigarette](#) companies such as Juul Labs Inc., whose vape devices have faced scrutiny over whether they appeal disproportionately to minors. Philip Morris International Inc. received a key authorization this month from the Food and Drug Administration, which found no evidence its IQOS 3 heated tobacco system led to increased youth uptake.

Still, not every type of product is falling out of favor. The CDC found no change in the use of cigarettes, heated [tobacco products](#), hookah or pipe tobacco by students. And despite an overall decline, nearly one-quarter of high school students still use some type of tobacco product.

The surprising resilience of cigarettes echoes findings by Altria Group Inc. that cigarette sales had remained strong during the Covid-19 pandemic. The company, which markets the Marlboro brand in the U.S., has said that some older smokers who had adopted vaping switched back to cigarettes.

Groups that promote e-cigarettes as less harmful than cigarettes have voiced concerns that 2019's spate of deadly lung-illnesses may have scared some vapers back to cigarettes. Anti-tobacco groups have said there's no proof that e-cigarettes are less harmful overall, and that they've helped addict a younger generation to [tobacco](#) through high levels of nicotine, as well as discreet packaging and fruity flavors, which regulators have since cracked down on.

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