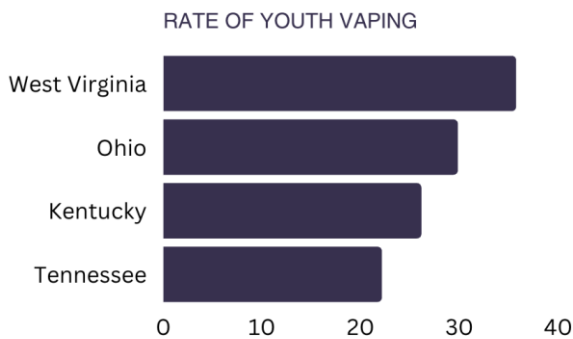


Youth Tobacco Use in West Virginia

This Science and Technology Policy Note defines youth access to tobacco products and provides the pro's and con's of regulatory actions, alternative methods to limit youth access, and an overview of West Virginia's current regulations.

High Rates of Tobacco Use Among West Virginia Youth

In 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that [West Virginia](#) had the highest percentage of youth vaping in the country at 35.7% of high school students. This number is higher than the rate of youth vaping in other Appalachian states including [Ohio](#) (29.8%), [Kentucky](#) (26.1%), and [Tennessee](#) (22.1%).



Further, youth cigarette use in 2022 was higher in [West Virginia](#) at 7.6% of high school-aged youth compared to other Appalachian states including [Ohio](#) (3.3%), [Kentucky](#) (4.9%), and [Tennessee](#) (4.9%).

What Are The Repercussion of Youth Tobacco Use?

Tobacco products contain nicotine, a highly addictive substance. Youth tobacco use can lead to life-long nicotine addiction, a susceptibility of addiction to [other drugs](#), impairments to [brain development](#), mental health problems such as [depression](#) and anxiety, and increased risk of death from [tobacco-related](#) diseases.

Approximately [4,300](#) West Virginians are expected to die prematurely from tobacco use each year. Tobacco-related healthcare expenses cost West Virginia over [\\$1 billion](#) annually with an additional [\\$2.4 billion](#) lost annually to tobacco-related productivity losses.

Research Highlights

- West Virginia has the highest rates of youth vaping in the county at [35.7%](#) and highest cigarette use ([7.6%](#)) in Appalachia.
- Youth tobacco use could continue into adulthood, contributing to the annual tobacco-related health care costs for West Virginia that exceed [\\$1 billion](#)
- In addition to enforcing current regulations (i.e., IDing prior to purchase; clean indoor air restrictions), potential policy options include:
 - limiting tobacco product advertising,
 - implementing school-related policies, and
 - increasing excise tobacco taxes.
 - Add licensing requirements for sale of vapes similar to other tobacco.

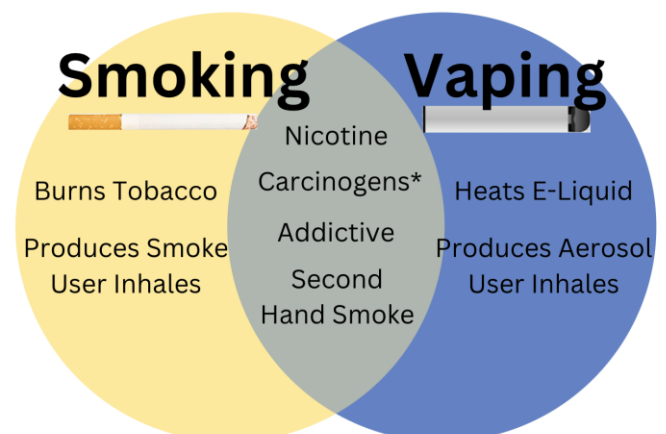
West Virginia State Tobacco Regulations

In 2020, the US federal government passed [H.R.2411](#) prohibiting the sale and distribution of tobacco products to those under the age of 21.

Currently, West Virginia requires vendors to have a license to sell tobacco, but not vape [products](#). In order to receive a tobacco sale license, the establishment must pass random, unannounced inspections to determine compliance rates administered by the Commissioner of the West Virginia Alcohol Beverage Control Administration.

Without such a requirement for selling vape products, there is less oversight of retailers' compliance with the minimum age restrictions for product purchases. These factors likely contribute to West Virginia's disproportionately high vaping rates.

W. Va. Code [§16-9A-4](#) banned tobacco products from school grounds except for instructional purposes (including at [West Virginia University](#) and [Marshall University](#)).



*[Carcinogens](#) are cancer causing substances that occur naturally or can be man made.

Potential Results From a Reduction in Youth Access to Tobacco

Restricting youth access to tobacco has been associated with a [14% reduction](#) in lifetime smoking prevalence.

- A decrease in adult smoking can save West Virginia over [\\$1 million](#) per smoker in lifetime healthcare costs, financial opportunity loss, and income loss.
- Preventing and limiting youth access to tobacco can **prevent** premature death from [smoking-related diseases](#).
- A decrease in youth access to tobacco could result in a potential **decrease in tobacco revenue** for the state
- From 2003 to 2007, [West Virginia](#) tobacco farms and crop revenue decreased from 500 farms and \$4 million in crop revenue to 70 farms and \$800,000 in crop revenue.

Tennessee Compared to West Virginia?

Tennessee has lower rates of youth vaping and smoking compared to other Appalachian states. Below are policies and initiatives taken by [Tennessee](#) to limit youth tobacco use.

Tennessee Policy and Initiatives	West Virginia Policy and Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community anti-drug coalition • Pregnant woman anti-smoking programs. • Securing additional funding for cessation and prevention including federal government grants, community foundations, private grants totaling up to \$5 million since efforts began. • Community programs (e.g., Tennessee Quit week; Smokefree Teen), state specific quit lines and texting programs to promote cessation for youth. • Smoke-free public housing • Tobacco Free schools and college campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Vaping Toolkit providing education on the dangers of tobacco which is available to parents, teachers, and schools • RAZE program to raise awareness and change attitudes towards tobacco • American Lung Association Tobacco Free schools and college campuses

What are Possible Policy Options to Reduce WV Youth Access to Tobacco?

Possible Policy Options	Challenges and Opportunities
Enforce existing rules (Federal Tobacco 21; State Clean Indoor Air Laws)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease tobacco use among youth • Decreased second-hand smoke exposure for non-smokers and decreases in smoking for current smokers
Limit Tobacco Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions on advertising have shown a 13% reduction in youth smoking initiation • Resistance from tobacco retailers and tobacco companies • \$113 million spent in marketing by tobacco companies in WV in 2020
Utilize School Related Policies (No sale within certain distance; No tobacco company sponsored lessons)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tobacco-sponsored school-based prevention programs have shown to be ineffective for reducing student use of tobacco • A higher density of tobacco retails near a school was correlated with increased smoking prevalence among youth
Increase Excise Tobacco Taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 10% increase in price is associated with a 3-5% reduction in smoking • Youth are more sensitive to tobacco price • Increase in taxes does not decrease revenue for the state in short, medium, and long term

For More Information: This Science & Technology Note was written by Andrea Milstred, M.S. on behalf of West Virginia University's Bridge Initiative for Science and Technology Policy, Leadership, and Communications. Please see <https://scitechpolicy.wvu.edu/> or contact scitechpolicy@mail.wvu.edu for more information.

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