

Youth Tobacco Use in West Virginia

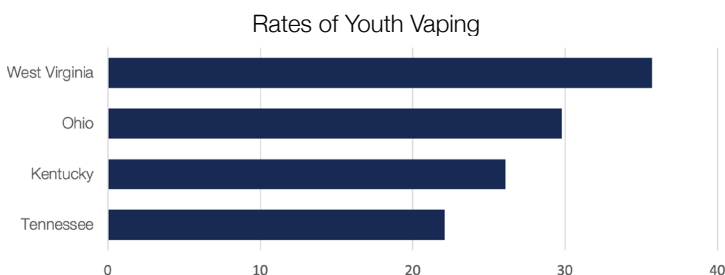
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This Science and Technology Note addresses youth access to tobacco products in West Virginia. It outlines the pros and cons of regulatory actions, presents alternative methods for limiting youth access, and provides an overview of West Virginia's current regulations.

High Rates of Tobacco Use Among West Virginia Youth

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

In 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that [West Virginia](#) also had the highest percentage of youth vaping in the country (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%).



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 to 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-

Research Highlights

- West Virginia has the highest rates of youth vaping in the country at 35.7% and the highest cigarette use (7.6%) in Appalachia.
- Youth tobacco use could continue into adulthood, contributing to annual tobacco-related health care costs for West Virginia, which currently 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.

related healthcare expenses cost West Virginia over [\\$1 billion annually](#), with an additional [\\$2.4 billion](#) lost annually to tobacco-related productivity losses.

West Virginia State Tobacco Regulations

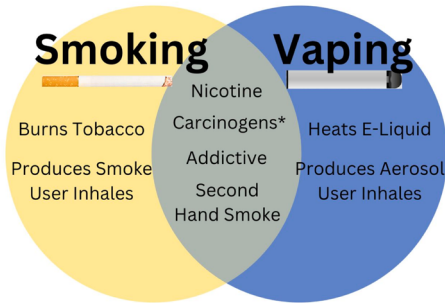
In 2020, the US federal government passed [H.R.2411](#), prohibiting the sale and distribution of tobacco products to those under the age of 21.

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

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.

Another regulation was established by W. Va. Code [§16-9A-4](#), which bans tobacco products from school grounds except for instructional purposes (including at [West Virginia University](#) and [Marshall University](#)).

Similarities and Differences in Smoking vs. Vaping



*[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.

Policy Options to Reduce West Virginia Youth Access to Tobacco

Policy Options	Opportunities and Challenges
Enforce existing rules (Federal Tobacco 21; State Clean Indoor Air Laws)	Decreased tobacco use among youth Decreased second-hand smoke exposure for non-smokers and decrease in smoking for current smokers
Limit tobacco advertising	Restrictions on advertising have shown a 13% reduction in youth smoking initiation Resistance from tobacco retailers and tobacco companies \$113.8 million spent in marketing by tobacco companies in WV in 2020
Utilize school-related policies (no sale within a certain distance; no tobacco company sponsored lessons)	Tobacco-sponsored school-based prevention programs have shown to be ineffective for reducing student use of tobacco A higher density of tobacco retailers near a school has been correlated with increased smoking prevalence among youth
Increase Excise Tobacco Taxes	A 10% increase in price is associated with a 3-5% reduction in smoking Youth are more sensitive to tobacco prices Increase in taxes does not decrease revenue for the state in the short, medium, and long term

Tennessee Compared to West Virginia

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

Tennessee Policy and Initiatives:

- Community anti-drug coalition
- Anti-smoking programs for pregnant women
- Securing additional funding for cessation and prevention, including federal government grants, community foundations, and 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 campuses

West Virginia Policy and Initiatives:

- [Youth Vaping Toolkit](#), providing education on the dangers of tobacco and 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

