

Vaping and Smoking amongst Learners in Year 7 to 11 in Wales

Analysis from The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey in Secondary Schools, 2025

September 2026

Chris Emmerson, Consultant in Public Health, Public Health Wales

Rebecca Hughes, Information Analyst, Public Health Wales

Mary-Ann McKibben, Consultant in Public Health, Public Health Wales

Laura Rich, Principal Public Health Practitioner, Public Health Wales

Dr Nicholas Page, Research Fellow, Cardiff University

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Vaping and Smoking amongst Learners in Year 7 to 11 in Wales

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Context

- The number of school aged learners who are vaping has increased substantially in recent years in Wales, with an increasing proportion of those vapers reporting never or not regularly smoking. There has been considerable concern amongst policymakers, teachers and education leaders, healthcare and public health professionals and young people themselves about the impact of these rises
- However, recent evidence has suggested that these rises may be levelling off or slightly declining in younger age groups
- Young people continue to have a poor understanding of the harms of vapes relative to smoking
- From June 2025, the sale of single use vapes has been banned in Wales and other countries of the UK. The Tobacco and Vapes Act, which bans the sale of tobacco to anyone born after 1 January 2009 and creates powers for Welsh and UK Governments to further regulate tobacco and vapes, received Royal Assent in April 2026
- Whilst evidence for the impact of the single use vapes ban is still emerging, and the Tobacco and Vapes Act became law after the 2025 SHRN survey, the passage of both these pieces of legislation/regulation have had a very high media profile and may have influenced attitudes and behaviours



- The SHRN Student Health and Well-being (SHW) survey is a large school-based survey that includes items on youth smoking and vaping behaviours. In total, 130,361 learners in Years 7 to 11 from 201 schools in Wales participated in data collection between September and December 2025

1.2. Key Findings

- The proportion of learners in Years 7 to 11 in Wales reporting vaping at least once per week is now 5.2%. This represents a fall since 2023, when the rate was 7%. The rate of vaping in these year groups is now comparable to 2021, when it was recorded as 5.4%
- Rates of vaping continue to be higher amongst girls (6.6%) than boys (3.7%) and the evidence suggests that vaping rates in all school years are stable or falling, with rates amongst Year 11 learners now estimated to be 12.8% compared to 15.9% in 2023
- The proportion of learners in Years 7 to 11 who report ever trying a vape has fallen from 25.7% in 2023 to 21% in 2025. Again, the figure for 2025 is comparable to that recorded in 2021 (20.5%). Recorded rates of 'ever use' of a vape have fallen in every year group compared with 2023
- Only 1.8% of learners in Years 7 to 11 now smoke regularly compared to 2.7% in 2023 and 3.1% in 2021. This suggests the decline in the proportion of learners in these years who smoke regularly is accelerating
- A total of 5.9% of learners in Years 7 to 11 either smoke or vape regularly in 2025, compared to 8% in 2023. As in 2023, the majority of nicotine users, 4.1% of all learners, are only-vapers. A total of 0.7% of all learners are only-smokers and 1.1% report smoking and vaping. This pattern is similar to 2023, with most smokers also vaping
- Overall nicotine use (smoking and vaping) amongst learners in Years 7 to 11 in 2025 was 6%, a fall from 8% in 2023 and the lowest proportion recorded since the 2019 SHW survey
- Using the most recent Welsh Government figures for the number of pupils enrolled in maintained schools in Wales by year and year group, these data suggest that around 9,100 learners in Years 7 to 11 vape regularly and 3,200 smoke regularly. These estimates represent reductions of around 3,200 learners vaping and 1,600 smoking compared to 2023. Around a third of vapers and smokers in these year groups are in Year 11

2. Introduction

Vaping is considerably less harmful than smoking but not risk free¹. Although only a minority of secondary age learners vape, biennial increases in rates amongst learners in Years 7 to 11 in Wales have been observed in data from the School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey since 2017². These increases have caused concern, in particular in relation to nicotine dependency amongst children and young people, amongst policymakers, education, healthcare, public health and youth services professionals and parents and carers, as well as children and young people themselves³.

It is a core principle of policy and practice in Wales and the UK that children and young people should not vape¹. A number of key policy measures have been taken to reduce vaping amongst children and young people in Wales and the UK. It has been illegal to sell a vape to anyone under 18 since 2015 and advertising vapes through broadcast media, newspapers and magazines, and sponsorship has been illegal since 2016. More recently, a ban on single-use vapes (put into place via environmental legislation but expected to reduce availability of cheap vaping products) came into force in June 2025; and the Tobacco and Vapes Act, which creates powers for Welsh and UK Governments to put in place restrictions on retail licensing, vape design, packaging and point of sale marketing, received Royal Assent in April 2026. Although the single-use vapes ban only preceded the 2025 SHW survey by a few months and the Tobacco and Vapes Act was passed following survey completion, both of these pieces of legislation had a high media profile and there is evidence to suggest that this may have had an impact on rates of vaping⁴.

A number of national surveys have suggested that vaping rates may have stabilised in recent years following the relatively rapid rises observed in the early 2020s. A levelling off of vaping in younger age groups is supported by figures from ASH, who have reported 7 to 8% of 11-17 year olds vaping in every survey of this age group in Great Britain between 2022 and 2025⁵. The Office for National Statistics reported daily vape use amongst 16–24-year-olds in 2024 at 6.1% and occasional use at 6.9%. Whilst there was a slight rise in daily use compared with 2023, when it was 6.9%, occasional use fell by two percentage points from 8.9% the previous year; in 2022 10.4% of 16-24 year olds were estimated to vape occasionally⁶. The most recent data from the smoking toolkit study (STS), a monthly survey of the adult population, suggests that after very strong rises from 2021 to 2023, the proportion of the 16-24 age group vaping is not rising at rates previously observed⁴. It is not clear what factors are driving these recent patterns of prevalence, although, as noted above, there is some evidence that the announcement of legislation regulating aspects of vapes may be associated with these changes⁴.

Robust data on the use of vapes by children and young people in Wales are essential for developing and implementing effective policies and services to meet the needs of this population. This report summarises data gathered between September and December 2025 by The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey in Secondary Schools. The SHW Survey provides the most up-to-date and reliable data on health behaviours, including smoking and vaping, amongst learners in Years 7 to 11 (aged 11 to 16) in Wales.

3. The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being Survey (SHW) in Secondary Schools

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a research-policy-practice partnership between Cardiff University, Welsh Government and Public Health Wales. SHRN administers the Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey in Secondary Schools to learners in Years 7 to 11 (i.e. learners aged 11-16) in Wales every two years. Questions on vapes (e-cigarettes) have been asked since 2017. The 2023 SHW Survey was administered between September and December 2025 and includes responses from 130,361 Year 7 to 11 learners from 201 schools in Wales.

Details of the survey, including sample frame and measures, are provided in Appendix 2.

4. Vaping amongst Year 7 to 11 Learners in Wales

4.1. Regular Vapers

In the 2025 SHW survey, 5.2% of all learners in Years 7 to 11 reported vaping regularly. Girls (6.6%) were more likely to report vaping than boys (3.7%). This reflects patterns seen in previous surveys and recorded in other surveys of children and young people in the UK.

As in previous years, the likelihood of vaping increases markedly with age. Whilst 0.6% of all learners in Year 7 and 1.5% of those in Year 8 report vaping regularly, this

proportion rises to 12.8% by Year 11. The estimated proportion of learners reporting vaping regularly is lower in every year group compared with 2023.

*Using the most recent Welsh Government figures for the number of pupils enrolled in maintained schools in Wales by year and year group, we can estimate that there were around 9,100 learners in Years 7 to 11 in Wales who are vaping regularly in 2025, and that this number has reduced by about 3,200 since 2023ⁱ. More than 2 in 5 (42.5%) of all regular vapers in these school years are estimated to be in Year 11. Figures for regular vaping by year group in 2023 and 2025 are shown in **Figure 1. Table 1** to*

Table 4 in Appendix 1 in show details of regular use of vapes by gender and year group, including confidence intervals, for 2023 and 2025.

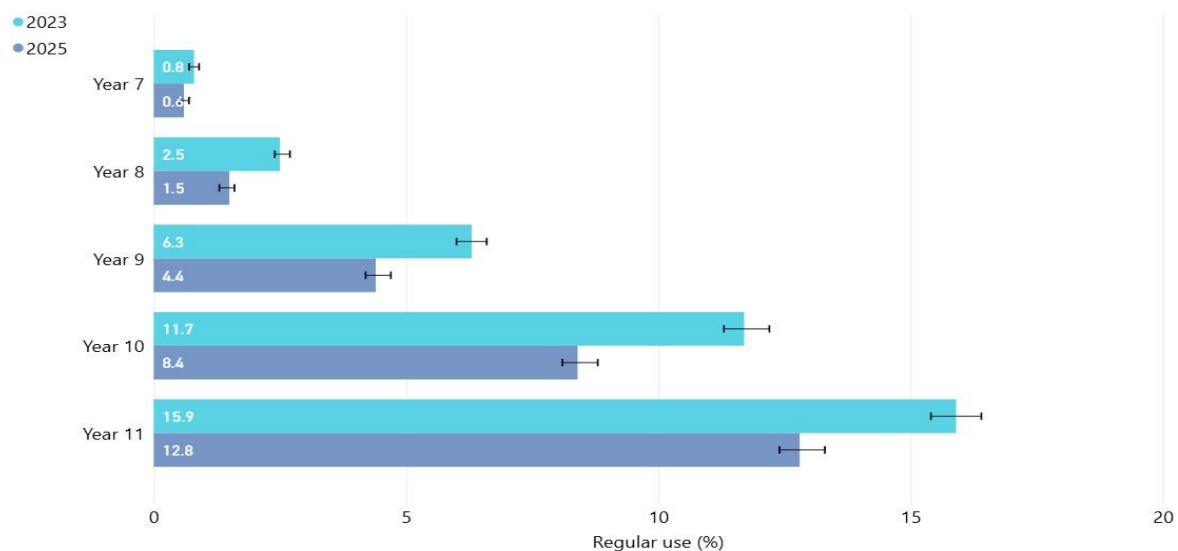


Figure 1: Regular (at least weekly) use of vapes, by year group, years 7 to 11, including 95% confidence intervals, 2023 and 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

4.2. 'Ever use' of Vapes

Just over one in five (21%) of all SHW Survey respondents in Years 7 to 11 reported ever having tried a vape ('ever use'). As with regular use, and consistent with previous

ⁱ Estimates of numbers smoking and vaping are based on applying the reported proportion of smokers and vapers in the SHW survey to school enrolment data from StatsWales⁷ for 2024-25 (the most recent figures) for the 2025 survey and enrolments for 2023-24 for the 2023 survey.



surveys, girls (23.4%) were more likely to report ever use of a vape than boys (18.4%). Ever use was also associated with age, with 6.2% of learners in year 7 reporting ever using a vape compared to 40.4% in Year 11. These proportions suggest that in 2025 around 36,800 learners in Years 7 to 11 have ever tried a vape, compared to around 45,300 in 2023.

The proportion of learners in years 7 to 11 reporting ever having tried a vape was 25.7% in 2023. The proportion of learners reporting ever use of a vape fell in every year group in 2025 compared with 2023. Figures for 'ever use' by gender and year group in 2023 and 2025 are shown in Table 1 to

Table 4 in Appendix 1, including confidence intervals.

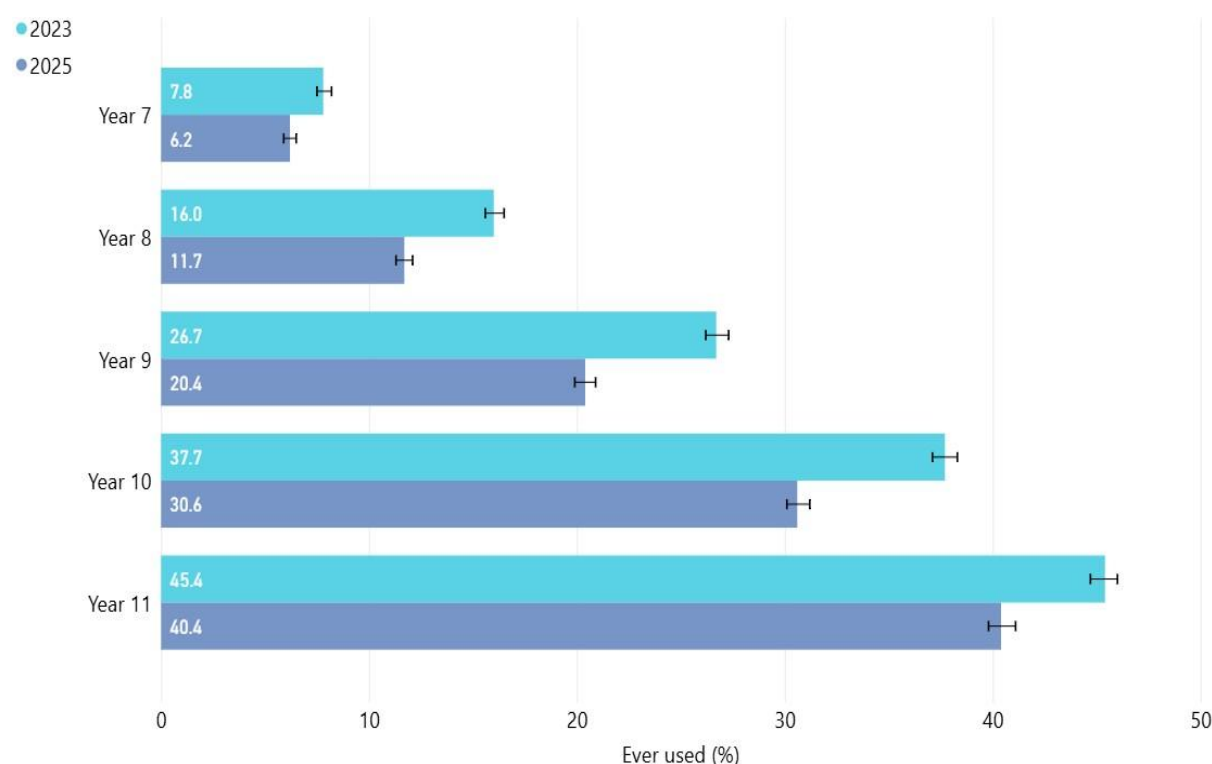


Figure 2: Ever use of a vape, by year group, years 7 to 11, including 95% confidence intervals, 2023 and 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey



5. Smoking amongst Year 7 to 11 Learners in Wales

5.1. Regular smokers

Children and young people are now much more likely to report vaping regularly than smoking regularly. In the 2025 SHW Survey, 1.8% of learners in Years 7 to 11 reported smoking at least weekly compared to 2.7% in 2023 and 3.1% in 2021. Patterns of use by gender are also different, with boys (2%) more likely to report being regular smokers than girls (1.2%). Those who recorded that neither 'girl' nor 'boy' described their gender were more likely to report both regular vaping (18.5%) and regular smoking (17.4%). As with vaping, the proportion of learners reporting regular smoking rose with age, but there were considerably fewer smokers than vapers in older year groups, with 3.9% of learners in Year 11 reporting smoking regularly compared to 12.8% vaping regularly.

These figures represent a substantial fall in the rate of smoking amongst learners in Years 7 to 11 relative to 2023, when it was 2.7% amongst all learners in and 5.5% amongst Year 11 learners. Across Years 7 to 11, an estimated 3,200 learners smoke regularly, 1,600 fewer than in 2023. As with vaping, a relatively high proportion of all smokers in these year groups are in Year 11 (37.2%).

Regular smoking by year group in 2021 and 2023 is shown in Figure 3.

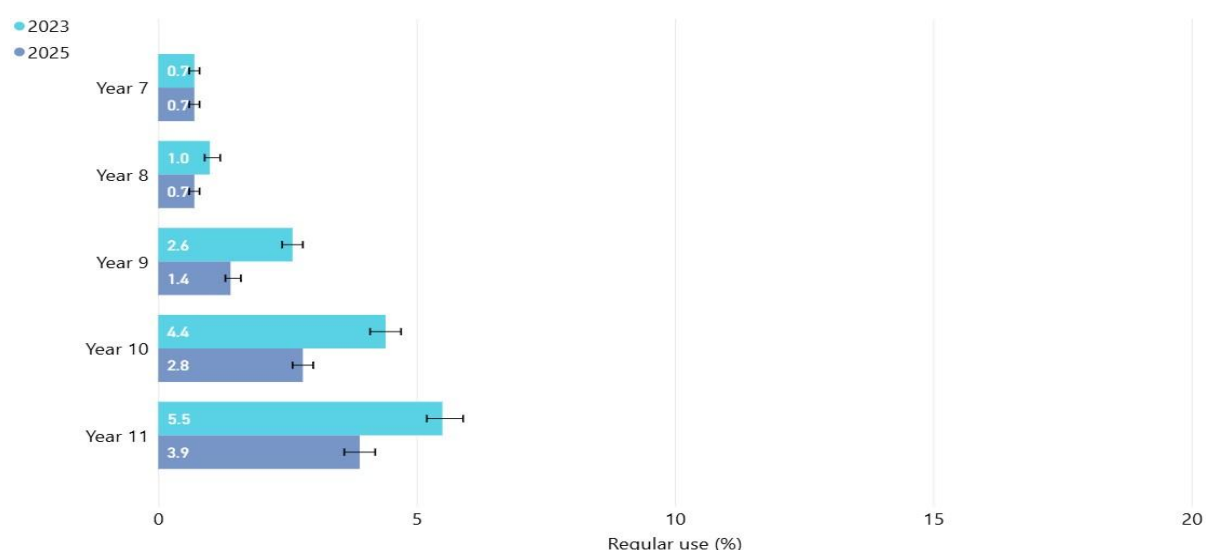


Figure 3: Regular (at least weekly) smoking, by year group, years 7 to 11, including 95% confidence intervals, 2023 and 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

5.2. 'Ever use' of Tobacco

'Ever use' of tobacco was reported by 5.7% of SHW Survey respondents across all years, with those in Year 11 (14.1%) most likely to report ever having tried tobacco. Despite the fact that boys were more likely to be regular smokers, girls (6.2%) were more likely to report ever trying smoking than boys (4.8%).

The proportion of learners in Years 7 to 11 reporting ever smoking in 2025 was lower than in 2023, when it was 8.2%. The proportion of learners reporting smoking in each year group fell between 2023 and 2025. The proportion of learners reporting ever smoking by year group is shown for 2023 and 2025 in Figure 4,

Table 6 to

Table 9 in Appendix 1 show detailed figures for tobacco use by gender and year group, including confidence intervals.

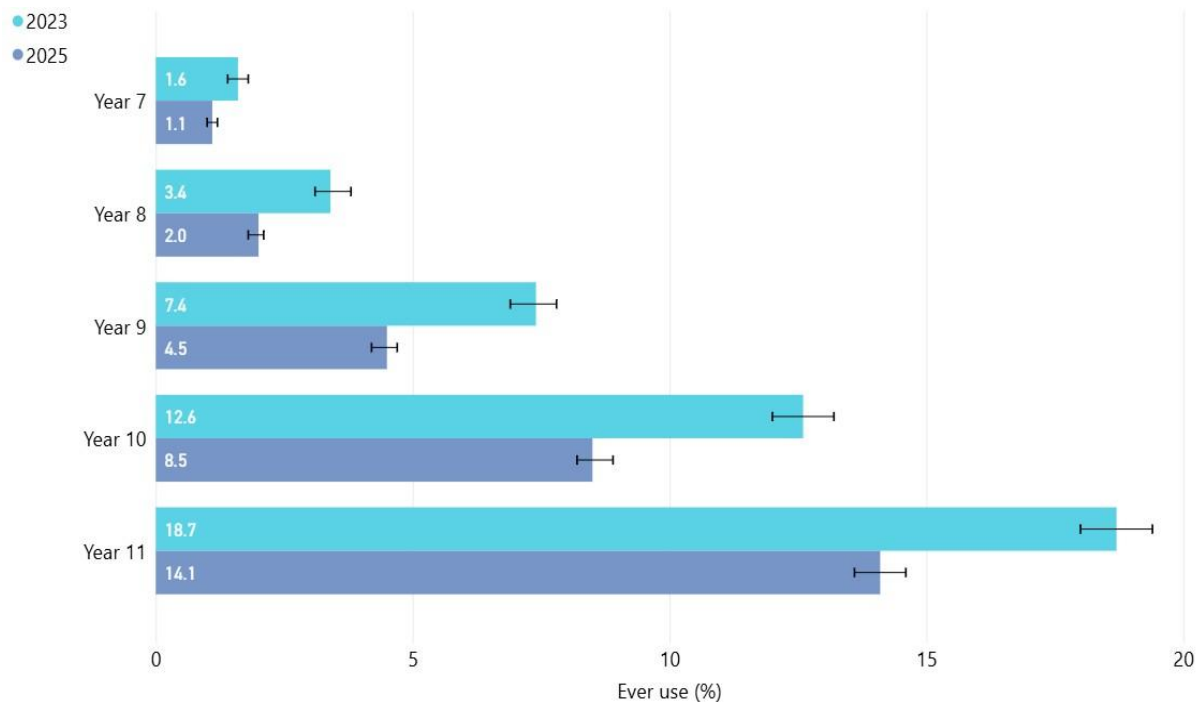


Figure 4: Figure 2: Ever use of tobacco, by year group, years 7 to 11, including 95% confidence intervals, 2023 and 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

6. Smoking and Vaping

Previous data from the SHW Survey have shown that whilst smoking and vaping commonly co-occur among learners in these year groups, patterns have changed over time. Data from the 2017 and 2019 surveys suggested that a majority of all those regularly using nicotine in these forms were smoking, with 'only smokers' making up half of all those who either smoked or vaped. However, since 2021, most users of nicotine from tobacco or vapes are vapers and a majority of all users are only-vapers.

Only 0.7% of learners in Years 7 to 11 were regular 'only smokers' in 2025, whilst 4.1% were regular 'only vapers' with 1.1% reporting regularly smoking and vaping. This means that overall nicotine use from tobacco and vaping products amongst these year groups in 2025 was 6%, a fall from 8% in 2023 and the lowest proportion recorded since the 2019 survey. It is also notable that between 2023 and 2025, not only did the overall proportion of learners in Years 7 to 11 who use nicotine in these forms fall, the proportions in each category (regular 'only vapers', 'only smokers' and 'dual users' in Years 7 to 11) fell. The proportion of regular smokers, regular vapers and regular 'dual

users' is shown in Figure 5. Detailed figures for only smokers, only vapers and dual users across SHW surveys are presented in Table 5.



Figure 5: Regular (at least weekly) use of (1) only vapes (2) only tobacco (3) dual users, years 7 to 11, 2017-25. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey. Note that the proportions in this figure may not sum

7. Limitations

As with previous SHW surveys, these figures are based on self-reported behaviour which may lead to biases due to recall and perceived social desirability of behaviour. Items relating to vaping in the survey do not specify nicotine vaping.

Changes in reported behaviour recorded in surveys over different years have not been tested statistically but assessed based on non-overlapping confidence intervals.

It is important to note that, as described in the text, analysis of overall nicotine use does not include emergent products such as nicotine pouches, although the most recent evidence suggests that use of these products remains low amongst children and young people relative to tobacco and vapes⁵.



8. Conclusion

This analysis of data from the 2025 SHRN SHW survey and comparison with previous years suggests that both smoking and vaping have fallen amongst learners in Years 7 to 11 since 2023, following notable rises in vaping over previous survey years. Consistent with analysis of the 2023 data, the evidence suggests that most vapers have never smoked and patterns of nicotine use over multiple surveys suggest that a large proportion have never smoked². Analysis of the 2025 survey also suggests that overall nicotine use is falling. Patterns of smoking and vaping across gender and age persist, with falls in overall rates being reflected in falls within most year group cohorts. Whilst there are likely to be many factors influencing changes in the rates of smoking and vaping amongst secondary learners, there is consistent evidence that legislation and regulation designed to reduce the availability and appeal of tobacco and vaping products to children and young people is effective in reducing prevalence of use of tobacco, vapes and other nicotine products^{4,8-10}.



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Acknowledgement

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a partnership between Cardiff University, the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales, funded by the Welsh Government. The views expressed here are those of the authors and not necessarily those of The School Health Research Network (SHRN) or Cardiff University.



Appendix 1: Data Tables

Table 1: Ever use and regular use of vapes, years 7 to 11, by gender, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Total (All-Wales)	Boy	Girl	Neither word describes me
Ever use	21.0% [20.8-21.3%] n=119,740	18.4% [18.1-18.7%] n=59,849	23.4% [23.0-23.7%] n=57,365	36.2% [33.9-38.7%] n=1,509
Regular use*	5.2% [5.1-5.3%] n=118,696	3.7% [3.5-3.8%] n=59,496	6.6% [6.4-6.8%] n=56,707	14.2% [12.5-16.0%] n=1,488
*At least weekly				

Table 2: Ever use and regular use of vapes, years 7 to 11, by gender, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2023. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Total (All-Wales)	Boy	Girl	Neither word describes me
Ever use	25.7% [25.5-26.0%] n=118,485	22.6% [22.2-22.9%] n=58,650	28.5% [28.1-28.9%] n=57,132	39.3% [37.0-41.7%] n=1,668
Regular use*	7.0% [6.9-7.1%] n=116,859	5.1% [5.0-5.3%] n=58,015	8.6% [8.4-8.9%] n=56,107	16.3% [14.6-18.2%] n=1,634
*At least weekly				



Table 3: Ever use and regular use of vapes, years 7 to 11, by year group, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Ever use	6.2%	11.7%	20.4%	30.6%	40.4%
	[5.9-6.5%]	[11.3-12.1%]	[19.9-20.9%]	[30.1-31.2%]	[39.8-41.1%]
	n=25,668	n=24,666	n=25,209	n=23,395	n=20,802
Regular use*	0.6%	1.5%	4.4%	8.4%	12.8%
	[0.5-0.7%]	[1.3-1.6%]	[4.2-4.7%]	[8.1-8.8%]	[12.4-13.3%]
	n=25,590	n=24,484	n=24,961	n=23,119	n=20,542
*At least weekly					

Table 4: Ever use and regular use of vapes, years 7 to 11, by year group, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2023. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Ever use	7.8%	16.0%	26.7%	37.7%	45.4%
	[7.5-8.2%]	[15.6-16.5%]	[26.2-27.3%]	[37.1-38.3%]	[44.7-46.0%]
	n=25,665	n=25,094	n=24,512	n=22,288	n=20,926
Regular use*	0.8%	2.5%	6.3%	11.7%	15.9%
	[0.7-0.9%]	[2.4-2.7%]	[6.0-6.6%]	[11.3-12.2%]	[15.4-16.4%]
	n=25,551	n=24,841	n=24,137	n=21,858	n=20,472
*At least weekly					



Table 5: Regular only-smokers, only-vapers and dual users, years 7 to 11, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2017-25. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	2017 (n=96,160)	2019 (n=108,052)	2021 (n=54,780)**	2023 (n=115,609)	2025 (n=117,262)
Regular* only-smoker	2.5% [2.4-2.6%]	2.7% [2.6-2.8%]	1.2% [1.1-1.3%]	1.0% [0.9-1.1%]	0.7% [0.7-0.8%]
Regular* only-vaper	2.0% [2.0-2.1%]	1.3% [1.3-1.4%]	3.5% [3.3-3.6%]	5.2% [5.1-5.4%]	4.1% [4.0-4.3%]
Regular* dual user	1.5% [1.4-1.5%]	1.4% [1.3-1.5%]	2.0% [1.9-2.1%]	1.8% [1.8-1.9%]	1.1% [1.1-1.2%]
Non-user	94.0% [93.8-94.1%]	94.6% [94.5-94.7%]	93.3% [93.1-93.5%]	91.9% [91.8-92.1%]	94.0% [93.8-94.1%]
*At least weekly **Note that questions on regular vape use were only asked to half the total sample in 2021 Note that the proportions in this table may not sum to proportions presented in other tables due to rounding					



Table 6: Ever use and regular use of tobacco, years 7 to 11, by gender, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Total (All-Wales)	Boy	Girl	Neither word describes me
Ever use	5.7% [5.6-5.8%] n=122,039	4.8% [4.7-5.0%] n=60,740	6.2% [6.0-6.4%] n=58,726	18.8% [16.9-20.8%] n=1,533
Regular use*	1.8% [1.7-1.9%], n=123,194	2.0% [1.9-2.1%], n=61,251	1.2% [1.1-1.3%] n=59,343	15.6% [13.9-17.5%] n=1,542
*At least weekly				

Table 7: Ever use and regular use of tobacco, years 7 to 11, by gender, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2023. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Total (All-Wales)	Boy	Girl	Neither word describes me
Ever use	8.2% [8.0-8.5%] n=61,312	6.9% [6.6-7.2%] n=30,308	9.2% [8.8-9.5%] n=29,562	22.5% [19.9-25.4%] n=875
Regular use*	2.7% [2.6-2.8%], n=121,486	2.7% [2.6-2.9%], n=59,736	2.2% [2.1-2.3%] n=58,866	17.4% [15.7-19.3%] n=1,700
*At least weekly				



Table 8: Ever use and regular use of tobacco, years 7 to 11, by year group, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Ever use	1.1% [1.0-1.2%] n=26,066	2.0% [1.8-2.1%] n=25,367	4.5% [4.2-4.7%] n=25,724	8.5% [8.2-8.9%] n=23,768	14.1% [13.6-14.6%] n=21,114
Regular use*	0.7% [0.6-0.8%] n=26,640	0.7% [0.6-0.8%] n=25,582	1.4% [1.3-1.6%] n=25,896	2.8% [2.6-3.0%] n=23,836	3.9% [3.6-4.2] n=21,240
*At least weekly					

Table 9: Ever use and regular use of tobacco, years 7 to 11, by year group, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2023. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Ever use	1.6% [1.4-1.8%] n=13,289	3.4% [3.1-3.8%] n=13,013	7.4% [6.9-7.8%] n=12,696	12.6% [12.0-13.2%] n=11,520	18.7% [18.0-19.4%] n=10,794
Regular use*	0.7% [0.6-0.8%] n=26,605	1.0% [0.9-1.2%] n=25,901	2.6% [2.4-2.8%] n=25,055	4.4% [4.1-4.7%] n=22,673	5.5% [5.2-5.9%] n=21,252
*At least weekly					



Table 10: Regular (at least weekly) use of vapes, years 7 to 11, by smoking status, including 95% confidence intervals and sample sizes, 2019-2025. Source: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey

	2019 (n=107,461)	2021 (n=54,434)†	2023 (n=114,664)	2025 (n=116,599)
Never/non-regular smoker*	1.2% [1.2-1.3%]	3.3% [3.1-3.4%]	4.9% [4.8-5.0%]	3.9% [3.7-4.0%]
Regular smoker **	38.2% [36.7-39.7%]	69.2% [66.9-71.4%]	72.6% [71.0-74.2%]	67.8% [65.7-69.8%]
*Non-regular smoker includes those who tried smoking once and occasional (<weekly) smokers **At least weekly †Note that questions on regular vape use were only asked to half the total sample in 2021				

Appendix 2: The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being Survey

Overview

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a research-policy-practice partnership between Cardiff University, Welsh Government and Public Health Wales which generates and translates research evidence to improve children and young people's health and well-being in Wales and beyond.

SHW Design and Sample

The Student Health and Well-being (SHW) Survey is a cross-sectional, school-based survey administered biennially to learners in years 7 to 11 in Wales, funded by Welsh Government. The survey is led by SHRN at Cardiff University and asks questions about young people's mental and physical health and social relationships.

The survey is administered electronically with data collected between September and December. Informed consent is obtained from all students prior to survey completion. Parents are free to withdraw their child from participating via a process of opt-out consent. Students can choose not to answer any question by selecting 'I do not want to answer'. Ethical approval is obtained from Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (SREC). In 2025, 130,361 students from 201 schools participated in the survey, with a school level response rate of 96%.

Measures

Students who reported having ever tried a cigarette (more than a puff) were classed as 'ever smokers'. Current smoking status was obtained by asking students how often they smoked at present, with students reporting daily or weekly smoking classed as 'regular smokers'. Equivalent measures were derived from comparable survey items for 'ever' and 'regular' use of vapes.

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ISBN 978-1-83766-936-3