Underage vaping in London

Key findings from the online survey

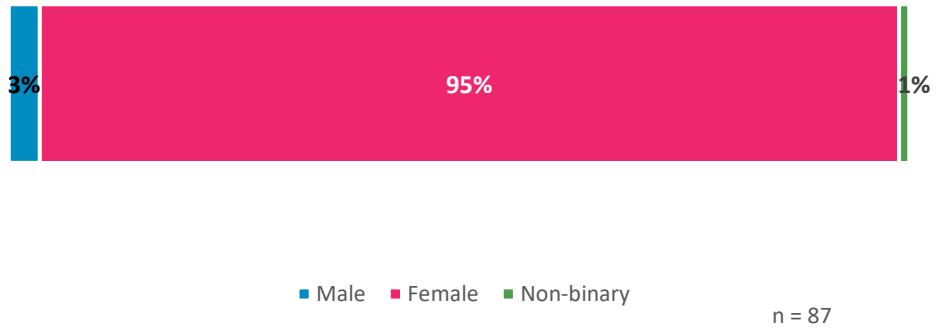
November 2026

Methodology and data limitations

- The survey ran for 4 weeks between 24 September 2026 and 25 October 2026. All responses were gathered via an online survey platform. The online form was designed by Research Unit staff and the Health Committee project team.
- The survey was promoted and shared with stakeholders and members of the public by the Committee and project team.
- The main aim of the survey was to gather views and experiences of vaping by younger people.
- The total number of completed respondents to the survey was 94.
- The respondents to the survey were self-selected. The respondents cannot be considered to be representative of the London population. The results should therefore be treated with caution. The findings can provide the Committee with an impression of some Londoners' experiences only.

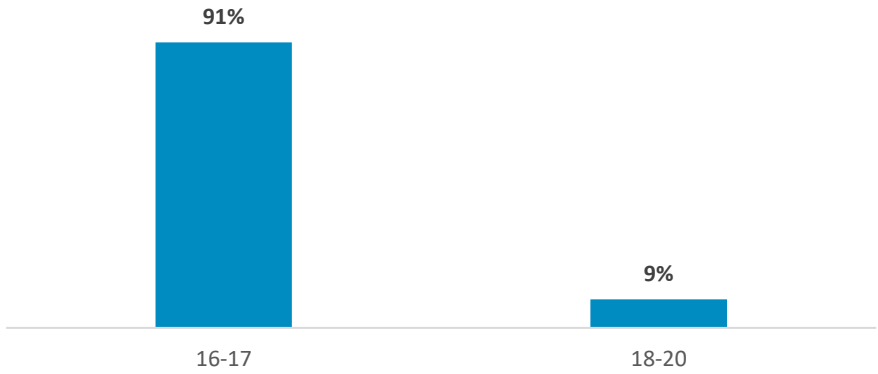
Demographics of survey sample

Gender of survey respondents



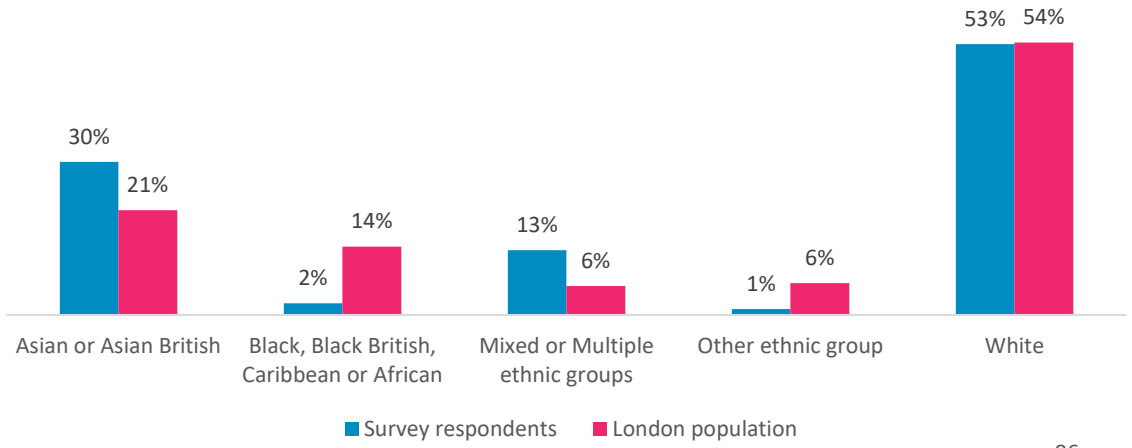
n = 87

Age group of survey respondents



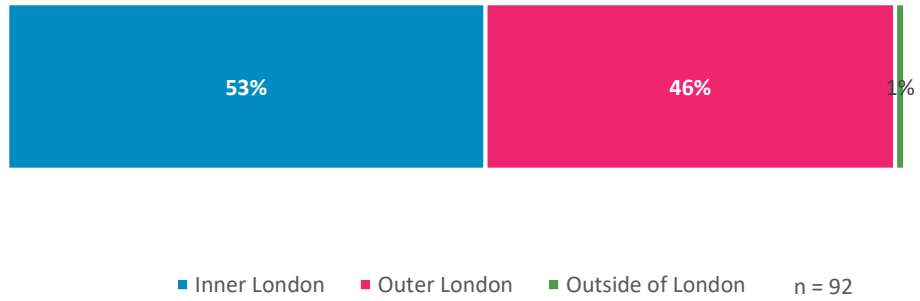
n = 88

Ethnicity of survey respondents



n = 86

Area of residence



n = 92

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Where questions were skipped or respondents answered ‘prefer not to say’, these are not included in percentage calculations.

Who took part in the survey?

- Almost all respondents (98 per cent) were young people aged 16 to 25.
- The remaining respondents were parents or carers of young people aged 11 to 17 (1 per cent) or people who work with young people, such as a youth organisation (1 per cent).

Data is from respondents' answers to the question "Which of the following best describes you?" [94 respondents]

Main reasons young people vape

- Most respondents identified peer pressure as one of the main reasons young people aged 11 to 17 vape. They highlighted the desire for young people to “fit in” and “look cool”. Some respondents also highlighted the addictive nature of vaping, suggesting that young people can become “hooked” after trying it. A few respondents suggested that young people may use vaping as a way of coping with stress.

“Nicotine is addictive, people try it from friends and get hooked. Vapes taste great, do not have the same stigma as smoking in our generation.”

- A young person aged 16 to 25

“Peer pressure, coping mechanism to deal with stress, seen older siblings/adults around them do it.”

- A young person aged 16 to 25

“Peer pressure, wanting to fit in, feeling like they have control over their lives, makes them feel more mature, form of rebellion.”

- A young person aged 16 to 25

“Because there are people around them who think it is 'cool' and the more people that do it the more peer pressure there is and the more they feel like to fit in they need to do it as well.”

- A young person aged 16 to 25

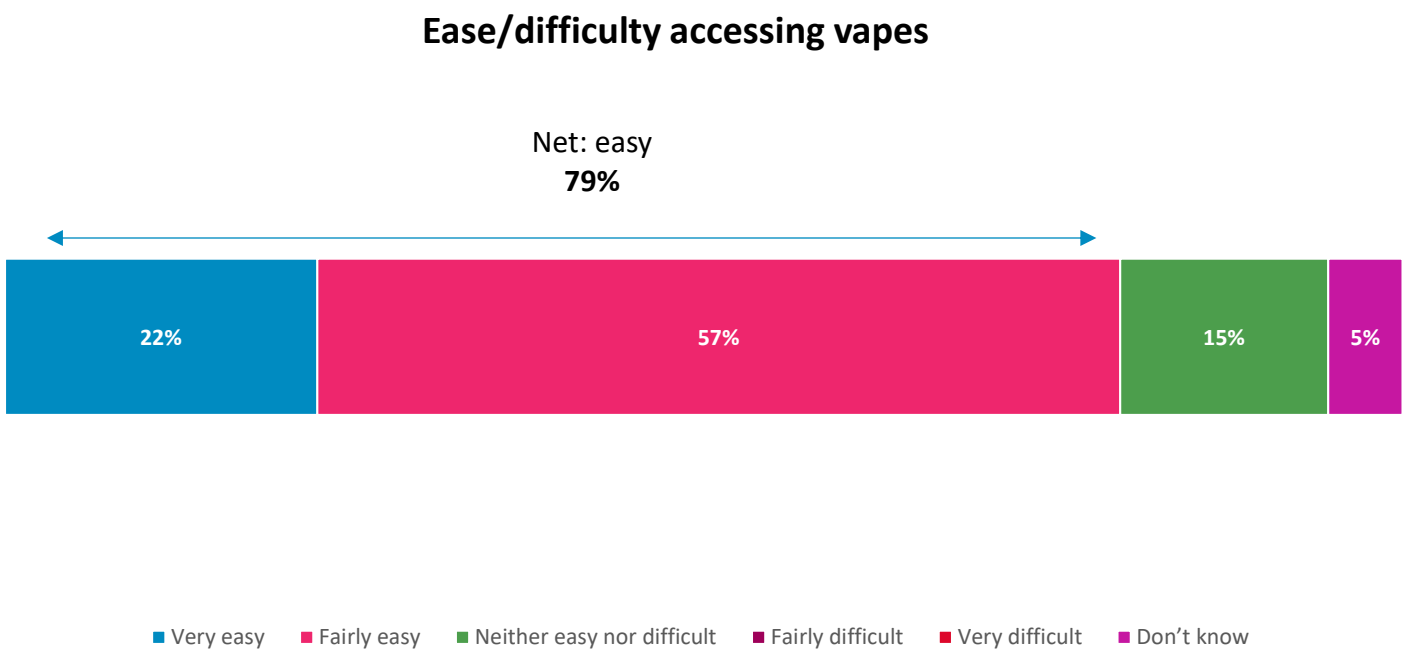
“To fit a certain aesthetic which appeals to them which ties them to certain types of people who they deem cool or maybe as a rebellious habit away from their family and friends to feel superior and independent.”

- A parent/carer of a young person(s) aged 11 to 17

Data is from respondents’ answers to the question “What do you think are the main reasons young people (aged 11 to 17) vape?”

Vapes are seen as easy for young people to access

- Most respondents (79 per cent) said they think it is easy for young people to access vapes, with 22 per cent saying it is very easy and 57 per cent saying it is fairly easy.
- No respondents thought accessing vapes was fairly difficult or very difficult for young people.



Data is from respondents' answers to the question "How easy or difficult do you think it is for young people to access vapes?" [94 respondents]

Thoughts on accessing vapes

- Respondents highlighted several ways in which young people can access vapes. Corner shops and off-licenses were frequently mentioned, with many respondents suggesting that some shops do not consistently check young people's ages or ask for ID.
- Another common theme was young people obtaining vapes through older friends, siblings or other family members who are legally able to purchase them.
- Some respondents also mentioned that the use of fake IDs to get around age restrictions. One youth organisation reported that the young people they supported had said that some young people are using AI tools to produce fake IDs to purchase vapes.

> "Our Youth Board told us that age checks are inconsistent and easy to get around. Young people reported [...] young people using AI tools to produce fake IDs to buy vapes in shops. This is a new risk that enforcement has not caught up with."
>
> - Someone who works with young people (e.g. youth organisation)

> "A lot of corner shops don't ask for ID and will just give it to people because they want money, otherwise parents and older siblings will give them to underage people."
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> "People I know get vapes from corner shops primarily, either using fake id's or asking and then not being age checked, which is very uncommon. Others may then use the person who starts using them to gain access without having to actually go to the shops."
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

Data is from respondents' answers to the questions "Please tell us about what you know about how young people (aged 11 to 17) access vapes, including whether age checks, such as asking for ID, are usually carried out. Please feel free to share your own experiences" and "Based on your experience of working with young people, please tell us about what you know about how young people (aged 11 to 17) access vapes, including whether age checks, such as asking for ID, are usually carried out."

Perceived effects of vaping on young people

- Respondents highlighted a range of potential effects of vaping on young people's health, wellbeing and daily lives. A common concern was the addictive nature of vaping and the risk of young people becoming dependent on nicotine.
- Many respondents also suggested that vaping can have serious consequences on young people's physical health, particularly their lungs. Some mentioned breathing difficulties, coughing, headaches and reduced fitness, while others highlighted the potential long-term health effects, including lung cancer.
- Some respondents highlighted the potential impact on mental health and wellbeing, including increased anxiety, stress and depression. They suggested that vaping could affect young people's concentration, motivation and ability to focus on schoolwork, as well as their relationships with friends and family.

> "Long term effects are not known, but short term they cause headaches, breathing problems (e.g. when running, my friends who vape joke about being out of breath because of them). Less concentration. Especially if someone is addicted, it can be at the forefront of their mind."
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> "I think it can become an addiction and people become dependent. It can lower wellbeing and can make other[s] uncomfortable."
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> "They become addicts, they crave a puff all the time, it disrupts routine and it's difficult to hide. It may damage your relationship with your friends or family if they disapprove. They also damage your health just as badly as cigarettes there's no positives to your health."
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

Data is from respondents' answers to the questions "What effects, if any, do you think vaping can have on young people's health, wellbeing, or daily life? Please feel free to share your own experiences." and "Based on your experience of working with young people, what effects, if any, do you think vaping can have on young people's health, wellbeing, or daily life?"

Helping young people quit vaping

- Many respondents highlighted the importance of providing education and raising awareness of the health risks associated with vaping. Some suggested holding more school assemblies and workshops to help young people understand the consequences of vaping.
- Many respondents also suggested different forms of support to help young people quit, including counselling, therapy and mental health support groups. Some emphasised the importance of providing non-judgemental support rather than punishing young people who vape.
- A few respondents also felt that young people's access to vapes should be restricted through stricter age checks and enforcement against shops selling to underage customers. Other responses included restrictions on advertising, flavours and packaging that appeal to young people.

> “Workshops in schools in the borough explaining the biological effect in the lungs of continuous vaping at a young age, so students who currently vape could see the outcome and may decide to stop vaping if they don't want their lungs to be damaged.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> “[Have] someone to talk to and more awareness of how to stop. I think most young people can't stop or get addicted so [there] has to be more ways to stop or substitutes which don't ruin them and are more accessible.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

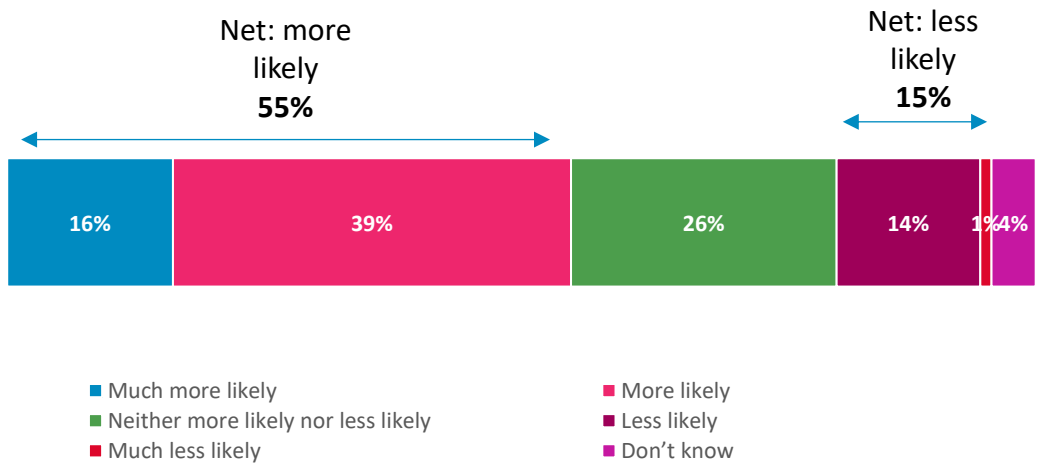
> “Sharing more traumatic experiences through assemblies with real people who have gone through them.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

Data is from respondents’ answers to the questions “What support do you think would help young people to stop vaping? Please tell us what you think would be most useful.”

Vaping and smoking tobacco cigarettes

- When asked whether they thought vaping made young people more likely to start smoking tobacco cigarettes, 55 per cent of respondents said it made them more likely to do so. Only 15 per cent thought it made them less likely.
- A common reason given was the risk of nicotine addiction. Many respondents suggested that becoming addicted to nicotine could make cigarettes more appealing. A few respondents also highlighted the perception of cigarettes as a more mature or “grown-up” alternative.
- However, others felt that young people would be more likely to stick to vaping because they preferred its flavours, convenience and trendiness.

Likeliness for young people to start smoking tobacco cigarettes



> “Even though vaping 'tastes better', I think for a lot of people its a first step and then tobacco is more 'mature'. But again, this depends from person to person. Some people really dislike tobacco and would just stick to vapes, so in that case it wouldn’t have much of an effect.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> “I believe once you get addicted it's easier to start smoking as well as you believe you need to inhale some sort of drug.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

Data is from respondents’ answers to the question “Do you think vaping makes young people more or less likely to start smoking tobacco cigarettes?” and “Please explain the reason for your answer.”

Main reasons for using nicotine pouches

- Of those who has heard of nicotine pouches, respondents highlighted several reasons why young people may use them. These include peer pressure, the influence of social media and online influencers, coping with stress, wanting to fit in and the perception that using nicotine pouches makes them look “cool”.
- Some respondents also suggested that young people use nicotine pouches to experience the effects of nicotine, such as getting a “high”, feeling a rush or experiencing a boost of energy.
- Another common theme was that nicotine pouches are discreet and easier to use in places where vaping or smoking is not permitted, such as schools. A few respondents also felt that young people may use pouches as an alternative to vaping or smoking, particularly when trying to reduce or stop their use.

> “To try to get over an addiction or to get a hit even when in school/ environment where they cannot vale /smoke.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> “TikTok’s and Instagram glorify them. many older influencers use them. However, i don’t think majority of those who vape use nicotine patches. Out of all the smokers I have come across (underaged) none of them have used nicotine pouches.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> “They are usually already addicted to vaping anyways and if they are trying to quit they may use nicotine pouches instead.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

> “They think it's cool to get high and it helps with stress and disappear in a different world they can escape to.”
>
> - A young person aged 16 to 25

Data is from respondents’ answers to the question “What do you think are the main reasons young people (aged 11 to 17) use nicotine pouches? Please feel free to share your own experiences.”

Perceived effects of using nicotine pouches

- Many respondents highlighted that nicotine pouches could lead to addiction, making it difficult for young people to stop using them. Some respondents also mentioned that young people could experience withdrawal symptoms, which may affect their mood, concentration and ability to focus on everyday activities, such as their schoolwork.
- Another common impact mentioned was the potential effect nicotine pouches could have on young people's oral health. Respondents mentioned gum damage, gum disease and other dental problems.
- Other effects mentioned include the wider effects on young people's mental health, including increased stress.

"Nicotine obviously is a very addicting drug and obviously even though I have never come across a teen that uses them, it would obviously cause heavy physical and mental reliance on the nicotine; similar to a drug addiction."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

"[...] Nicotine pouches contain more mg of nicotine than cigarettes, which can trap a young person into a cycle of addiction much faster than adults."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

"[Nicotine pouches can] destroy your gums and make you more addictive to nicotine."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

"Nicotine as a product is highly addictive, meaning it leads to greater mental load and stress, and means they are spending greater time thinking about nicotine."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

The above quotes are from respondents' answer to the question, "What effects, if any, do you think nicotine pouches have on young people's health, wellbeing, or daily life? Please feel free to share your own experiences."

Other thoughts on vaping by young people

"Our Youth Board were clear that new restrictions will only work if enforced consistently, with ID checks for vapes as strict as those for alcohol and tobacco. They see current enforcement as half-hearted and easily undermined by retailers putting profit first.[...] We would welcome recommendations for funded, youth-friendly cessation support, a shift in schools from punishment to support, and a role for youth organisations in prevention and education."

- Someone who works with young people (e.g. youth organisation)

"[Vaping] happens in schools more [often] than you'd think like this one girl in year 8 posted a TikTok of her doing a trick with the smoke and i was shocked as she's such a sweet girl in school you just never know."

- A parent/carer of a young person(s) aged 11 to 17

"[Vaping] effects years 8-9 most. [This] tends to be when most people are addicted."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

"I honestly think if you make vapes super expensive less people would get them, and they'd use that as the "excuse" for not vaping if that makes sense."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

"Loads of people are normalising it, parents don't really care for it that much easier as they aren't informed about the dangers or parents influence children to vape. People get access to vapes easily."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

"Make the health implications with vaping known to young people, especially people who have been hospitalised because of vaping so young students don't take the risks as not serious."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

"I would also say that cigarettes are pretty expensive and that vapes can be a lot cheaper and that can also be an incentive for people."

- A young person aged 16 to 25

Data is from respondents' answers to the question "Is there anything else you would like to share about underage vaping in London?"