

Vapes, Not Cigarettes, Are Now the First Nicotine Product for Most Filipino Youth Users



Background

Globally, cigarettes have historically been the entry point into nicotine use for adolescents. The rise of flavored, disposable, and easily accessible e-cigarettes has changed that pathway. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 11900 (the Vape Law) prohibits flavor descriptors and marketing tactics that "appeal particularly to minors," but **enforcement has been uneven, and many youth continue to access these products.**

This study examined **which product Filipino students try first, at what age, and why, even in cities where tobacco control programs are actively implemented.**

Methods



A self-administered survey was conducted among **4,340 students in Grades 7–10 in Baguio, Pasig, Iloilo, and Davao** between November and December 2025.



All four cities have ongoing tobacco and vape control initiatives. Survey items on initiation, first product used, and reasons for initiation were adapted from the GYTS and PATH Youth Survey and contextualized for Filipino adolescents. Open-ended responses were thematically analyzed.

Key Findings & Implications

Even in cities with active tobacco control programs, **vapes have become the most common first nicotine product.**

Among students who had ever used any nicotine product,



reported a vape, e-cigarette, or HTP as their first product, **nearly three times the 250 who started with cigarettes.**

Among current vape users,

58.1%



confirmed that **vape** was the **very first nicotine product** they ever tried.

Initiation begins early.

Ever vape/
HTP users:

48.1%

initiated at **≤12 y/o**

Ever cigarette
users:

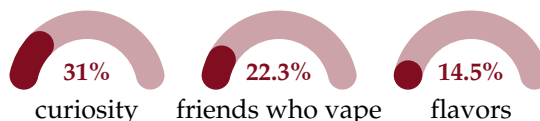
35.8%

initiated at **≤11 y/o**

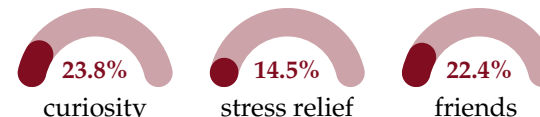
Why students try

The reasons students give for trying vapes point directly to features that current regulations are supposed to limit:

Vapes



Cigarettes



Key Recommendation

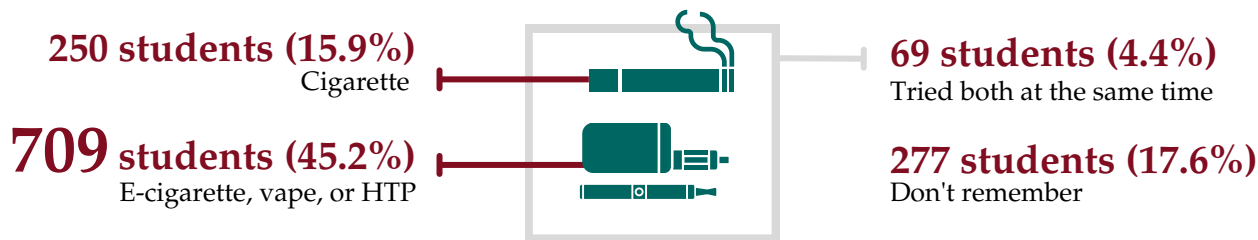


The persistence of peer-driven experimentation and flavor-driven initiation, despite RA 11900's prohibition on youth-appealing descriptors, **highlights weak enforcement and the urgent need for a ban on flavored and disposable vape products.**

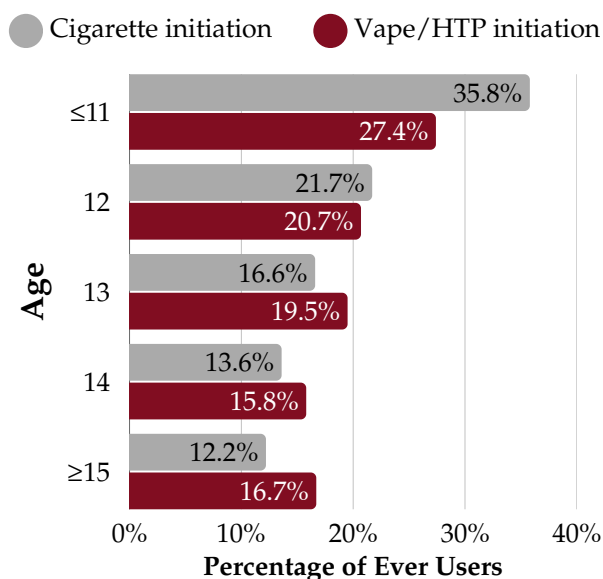
Prevention efforts must reach children before age 12, and stronger enforcement of flavor and marketing restrictions, or a comprehensive ban on flavored and disposable vape products, is needed to interrupt the current entry pathway into nicotine use.

Supplemental Results

First Nicotine Product Tried (among ever users, n=1570)

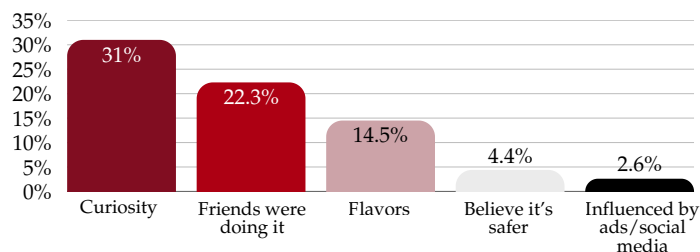


Age of First Use Among Ever Users

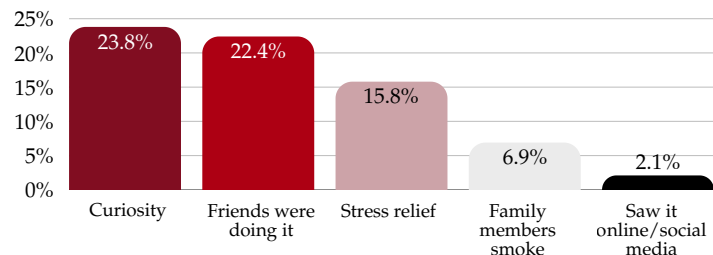


Top Reasons for Trying

Vapes



Cigarettes



What Students Said

Qualitative responses described initiation as embedded in everyday social life: **trying a friend's vape at school, watching family members smoke at home, or experimenting with flavors out of curiosity.** Many students named specific vape brands and flavors, while cigarette descriptions were more generic, suggesting that vape products occupy a more consumer-oriented space in adolescents' awareness.

Contact us!

For questions and concerns, reach out to us through the following channels:

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