

## E-Cigarettes & COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has killed hundreds of thousands and sickened millions across our country. It has also magnified the public's awareness and understanding of public health and the importance of preparedness and resiliency - traits that Mainers have always valued. We need to double-down on our efforts to strengthen our infrastructure, our workforce, and our health.



### **Tobacco Use: A leading risk factor for COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed health disparities and the many underlying risk factors for COVID-19, including evidence that tobacco use can increase the risk of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

- Among young people who were tested for the virus that causes COVID-19, research found that those who used e-cigarettes were 5-7x more likely to be infected than those who did not use e-cigarettes.<sup>1</sup>
- According to a recent study, “Teens and young adults need to know that if you use e-cigarettes, you are likely at immediate risk of COVID-19 because you are damaging your lungs.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Maine youth are particularly vulnerable**

The evidence is clear that tobacco products, whether smoked, chewed, or vaped, are often the first addictive product our youth are exposed to, and that nicotine exposure impacts the developing brain and creates susceptibility to other addictions later in life.<sup>2</sup> Early life tobacco use can lead to increased impulsivity and mood disorders.<sup>3</sup>

- The tobacco industry is laser-focused on youth and young adults, even calling them their “replacement smokers.”<sup>4</sup>
- Industry has developed an array of candy- and fruit-flavored products in colorful packaging to attract youth and mask the harsh taste of tobacco. Examples of flavors include: Yummy Gummy, Vanilla Birthday Cake, Pop Tart, and Cotton Candy.
- More than 85% of e-cigarette users ages 12-17 use flavored e-cigarettes, and flavors are the leading reason for youth use.<sup>4</sup>
- The tobacco industry spends an estimated \$45.8 million annually marketing to Maine youth.<sup>5</sup>

Nearly 18% of Maine adults smoke cigarettes and 30% of high school students use tobacco products,<sup>6</sup> driven in large part by the explosion of e-cigarette use among high school students. In fact, more than 1 out of 4 Maine high school students uses e-cigarettes – a rate that has nearly doubled in the past two years, with largest percent increases seen in Piscataquis and Oxford counties.<sup>6</sup>

**Our kids don't know the risks they are taking when they inhale. It's time to unmask Big Tobacco's campaign to hook Maine's next generation.**

**While 99% of e-cigarettes contain nicotine, 54% of Maine youth think it's “just flavoring.”<sup>6</sup>**





It's within our power to make concrete improvements to Maine's public health system - to save money and save lives.

Maine needs an all-hands-on-deck approach to reverse the youth tobacco epidemic, including ending the sale of all flavored products, investing in prevention, and raising the price of tobacco products.

These policies work together to address the attractiveness, appeal, affordability, and availability of tobacco products.

Good health changes everything – healthy kids are ready to learn, workers are more productive, older adults can stay in their homes, communities are strong and thriving, employers spend less on insurance coverage, and people live longer with a better quality of life. The bottom line: we all want our children to grow up strong and our families to be safe and secure.

**Maine can address the COVID-19 pandemic while ensuring we're better prepared for resurgence and future outbreaks by updating and strengthening our tobacco program and policies.**

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## Endnotes

- 1 Digitale E. 2020. Vaping linked to COVID-19 risk in teens and young adults. *Stanford Medicine*. <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2020/08/vaping-linked-to-covid-19-risk-in-teens-and-young-adults.html>.
- 2 Ren M & Lotfipour S. 2019. Nicotine gateway effects on adolescent substance use. *West J Emerg Med*; 20(5): 696–709.
- 3 US Department of Health and Human Services. 2016. *E-Cigarette use among youth and young adults: A report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health.
- 4 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK). 2001. Tobacco company quotes on marketing to kids. <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0114.pdf>.
- 5 CTFK. 2020. The toll of tobacco in Maine. <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/maine>.
- 6 Maine Department of Health and Human Services & Maine Department of Education. 2017. Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey.



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