

Tobacco Product Trends in Philadelphia

Exploring the role of electronic and flavored products

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Declines in tobacco use in the United States are an important public health achievement of the past 60 years.¹ Tobacco control efforts—educating the public on smoking’s dangers, increasing the cost of products through taxes, restricting sales, banning tobacco advertising, and passing smoke-free air laws—have decreased tobacco consumption and prevented millions of premature deaths due to smoking in the U.S.² Reductions in the U.S. smoking rate were largely the result of decreasing experimentation and initiation of tobacco use among youth.³ But there is growing alarm over the potential for electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes or vapes) to reverse these trends. According to the most recent data, youth now experiment with and use e-cigarettes more than any other tobacco product.⁴

Nicotine, found in tobacco products, is highly addictive, and quitting is hard. The best way to reduce the negative health impacts of tobacco is to avoid these products altogether. Aspects of the tobacco retail environment—like tobacco marketing, density of tobacco outlets, price, and flavorings—impact tobacco use and can be addressed through comprehensive regulations from federal, state, and local governments.⁵

In this CHART we examine trends in cigarette use and the rise in popularity of e-cigarettes, especially among youth. Using data on tobacco sales in Philadelphia, we explore the role of product flavorings in driving sales of the most common tobacco products—cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco. Data in this CHART highlight the tobacco industry’s continued efforts to target youth and encourage tobacco use through product flavorings.

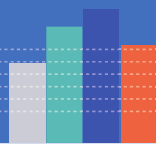
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Use of traditional cigarettes is at its lowest point in decades

The rise in popularity of e-cigarettes (vapes), especially among youth, could reverse historic declines in tobacco use

Only 2% of Philadelphia youth report smoking cigarettes, but 19% report use of e-cigarettes (vapes)

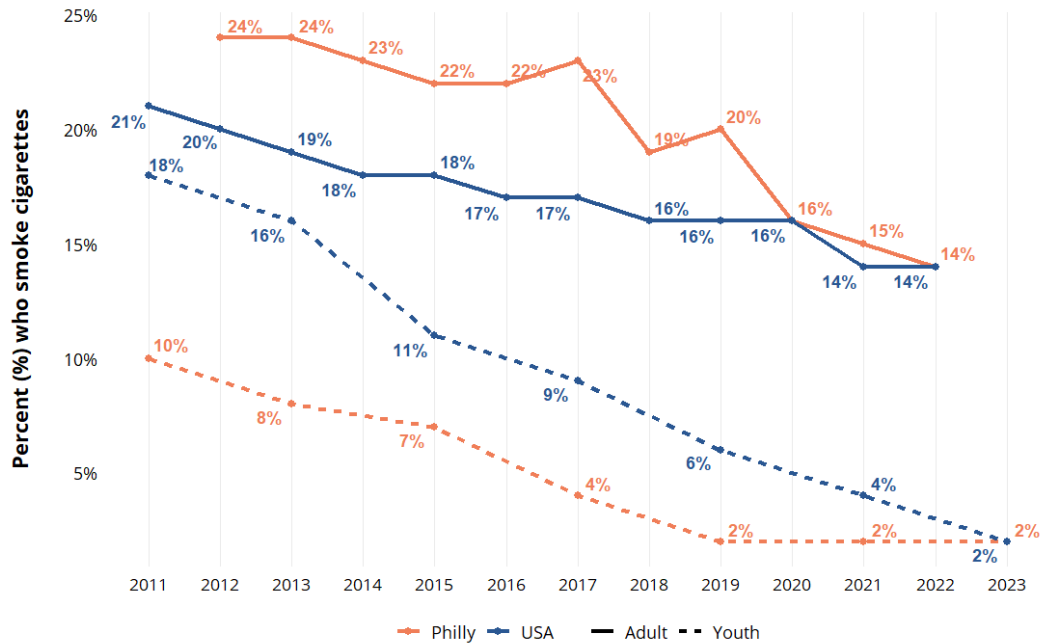
Product flavorings like mint, menthol, and candy flavors drive tobacco sales



Downward trends in national and local rates of cigarette smoking show the positive impact of public health action against tobacco use

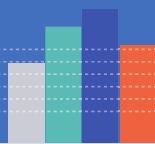
Cigarette smoking among adults and youth

Philadelphia and the U.S., 2011 - 2023



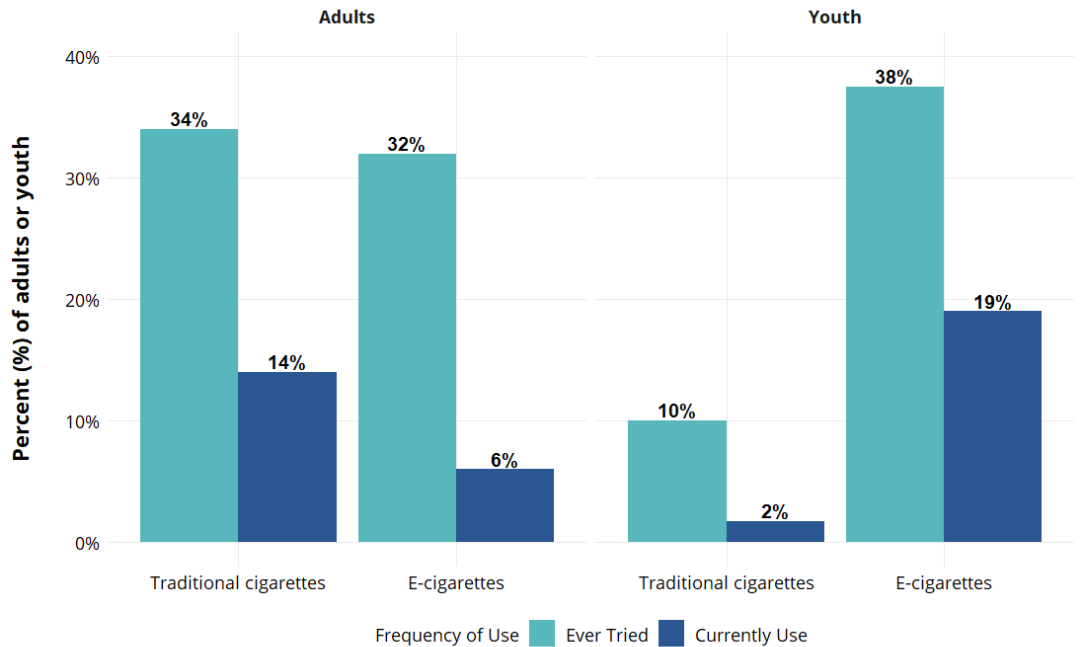
Data sources: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Youth Risk Behavior Survey

- In the U.S., adult cigarette smoking peaked in the 1960s, when an estimated 42% of the adult population used cigarettes. Since then, cigarette smoking has been on a slow, steady decline.⁶ *Data not displayed.*
- Comparable data became available for Philadelphia in 2012. At that time, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) adults in Philadelphia smoked, compared to 1 in 5 (20%) nationwide.
- In 2022, the adult smoking rate in Philadelphia and the U.S. had dropped to 14%.
- For youth in the U.S., cigarette smoking peaked in the late 1990s. In 1997, an estimated 36% of high school students smoked cigarettes regularly.⁶ *Data not displayed.* By 2023, that number had reduced to only 2%, reflecting the potential for serious declines in tobacco use for future generations.
- In Philadelphia, the youth smoking rate decreased from 10% in 2011 to just 2% in 2023, or from 1 in 10 youth to 1 in 50.



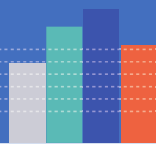
E-cigarettes (vapes) are more popular than traditional cigarettes among youth, reversing earlier declines in youth tobacco use

Traditional and electronic cigarette use among adults and youth Philadelphia, 2022 (Adults) and 2023 (Youth)



- Philadelphia high school students experiment with and use e-cigarettes more than cigarettes. The most recent data show that 38% of youth have tried e-cigarettes at least once and 19% currently use e-cigarettes. Meanwhile, experimentation and use of traditional cigarettes are at all-time lows—one in ten (10%) youth have tried cigarettes and 2% report current use.
- Among Philadelphia adults, use of traditional cigarettes (14%) remains more common than e-cigarettes (6%). However, almost equal numbers of adults have tried e-cigarettes (32%) and traditional cigarettes (34%).

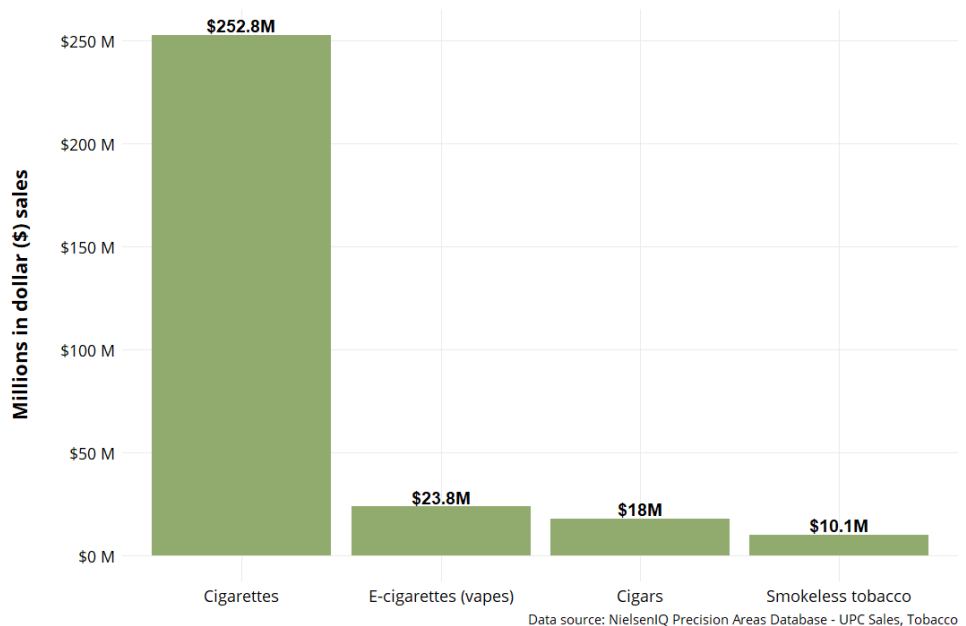
*Data Note. For youth, “Currently use” is use of the tobacco product within the past month and “Ever tried” is ever tried, even once. For adults, “Currently use” is using some days or every day, “Ever tried” cigarettes is smoking at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and “Ever tried” e-cigarettes is any reported use.



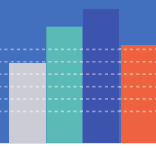
Tobacco is an industry—their goal is to increase product sales

Tobacco sales (\$ Millions) by product type

Philadelphia, June 2021 - June 2023



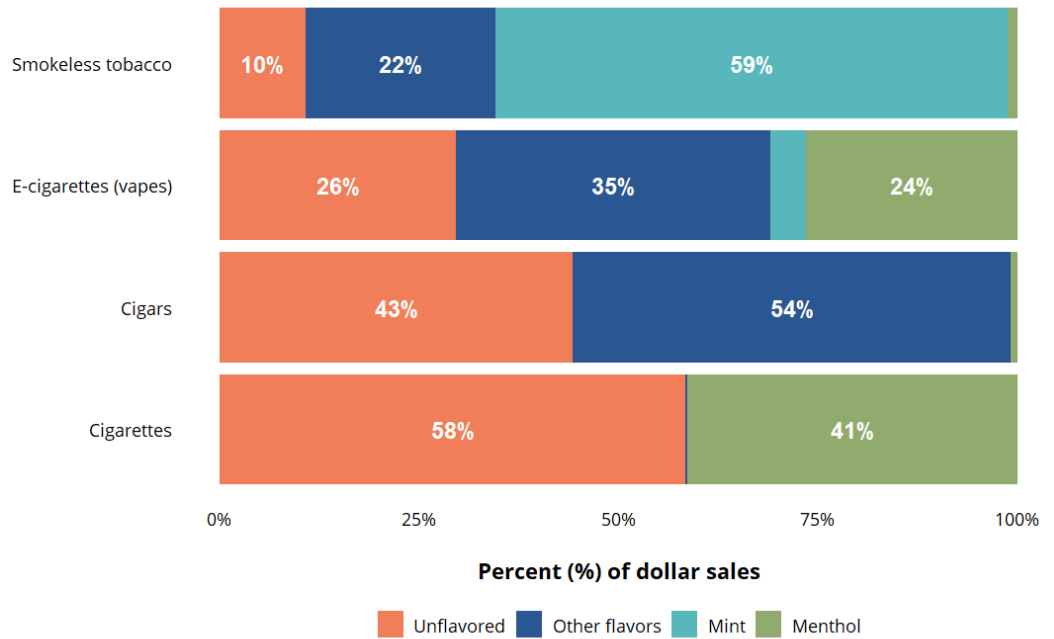
- We analyzed over \$300 million in tobacco industry sales data from major retail chains in Philadelphia like 7-Eleven, Wawa, Walmart, Target, Walgreens, and Family Dollar. Cigarettes, e-cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco had the highest sales and are presented here.
- In the two-year period from June 2021 to June 2023, there were \$252.8 million in cigarette sales, alone, in Philadelphia.
- Cigarette sales were much higher than any other tobacco product. But, despite being newer to the market than products like cigars and smokeless tobacco, e-cigarette products accounted for the second highest amount of tobacco sales, at \$23.8 million.
- This data is useful for understanding trends in tobacco sales by product type and flavoring. However, it didn't include sales from independent corner stores, tobacco shops, and vape shops, so the numbers presented here underestimate tobacco product sales in Philadelphia.



Product flavorings like mint, menthol, and candy flavors drive tobacco sales

Flavored tobacco sales by product type

Philadelphia, June 2021 - June 2023, % of sales



Data source: NielsenIQ Precision Areas Database - UPC Sales, Tobacco

- Unflavored products account for less than half of sales for smokeless tobacco (10%), e-cigarettes (26%), and cigars (43%).
- The highest sales for smokeless tobacco were for mint-flavored products (59%).
- For e-cigarettes and cigars, sales were highest for other flavors—35% and 54%, respectively. Other flavors used in tobacco products have names related to alcoholic beverages, fruit, and candy (see the following page for examples).
- Most teens start using tobacco with **flavored products**. These products are appealing to young people, and many mistakenly believe that they are less harmful.⁷
- Cigarettes were the only tobacco product type where sales for unflavored products were higher than flavored. Still, 41% of cigarette sales were for menthol products.*
- **Menthol** reduces the harshness of tobacco smoke, making cigarettes more appealing and easier to use for young people who are starting smoking. These products are more addictive and harder to quit than unflavored cigarettes.⁸

*Note. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned the sale of flavored cigarettes, except for menthol, in 2009.



WHAT THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY IS DOING

- Historical efforts by the tobacco industry to target youth and mislead the public about the harms of tobacco are well documented.
- The tobacco industry has a powerful lobby and exerts its influence for financial gain at the expense of people who are addicted to tobacco products.
- Despite claims by the tobacco industry that they are moving away from cigarettes in favor of potentially less harmful products, they are **actively opposing** federal regulations that could prevent youth initiation and help adults to quit, including:
 - Restrictions on the manufacture of mentholated tobacco products.
 - Restrictions on the manufacture of flavored cigars.
 - Requirements to minimize nicotine levels in tobacco products to make them less addictive.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

There is need for comprehensive regulations on tobacco products at the federal, state, and local level. We should also ensure adequate funding to support and expand vaping prevention, education, and communication efforts at the local level.

The Health Department is:

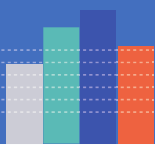
- Implementing regulations that limit the density of retailers permitted to sell tobacco in the city and near our schools, with a focus on improving equity across neighborhoods and addressing the disproportionate location of tobacco retail and its associated advertising in communities of color.
- Conducting youth tobacco sales compliance checks to ensure that stores do not sell tobacco products to minors.
- Denying tobacco permit renewals to retailers who repeatedly sell tobacco to children.
- Running mass media campaigns to promote quitting.
- Collaborating with schools and youth serving organizations on vaping prevention, education, and communication initiatives.

Health care providers should:

- Screen, assess, treat, and refer all patients for tobacco use disorder treatment.
- Offer FDA-approved cessation products and referrals to cessation programs for patients interested in help quitting.
- Counsel all pre-teens and teens about the dangers of these products.
- Utilize educational opportunities to keep abreast of the changing tobacco product landscape.

People can:

- Avoid all tobacco products. There is no safe level of tobacco product use.
- Keep your home, vehicles, and workplaces completely smoke- and vape-free.
- Ask your physical health or behavioral health provider for support quitting tobacco.
- Use FDA approved cessation medications and counseling to support tobacco cessation. E-cigarettes are not approved by the FDA to help people quit smoking. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visit [PA Free Quitline](#) for help quitting and free nicotine replacement therapy.
- Report any retailer selling tobacco to youth or without a permit. Call or text "SALES" to 1-888-99-SMOKE or go to <https://smokefreephilly.org/report-illegal-activity/>.
- Talk to the children and teens in your life about the dangers of tobacco and vaping products.



RESOURCES

For help quitting and free nicotine-replacement therapy medications:

1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669)

Smokefreephilly.org

[PA Free Quitline](#) (with [online services](#))

For information on e-cigarettes (vapes):

<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/vaping-devices-electronic-cigarettes>

<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/health-effects.html>

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Suggested citation:

Philadelphia Department of Public Health. Tobacco Product Trends in Philadelphia. CHART 2024;9(2):1-8.



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www.phila.gov/departments/department-of-public-health/data/chart/