# Vaping rates in the UK stabilise as users shift away from disposable devices ahead of ban



New research conducted by University College London (UCL) suggests that the recent surge in vaping across the UK has stabilised, with significant shifts in the types of devices used ahead of an imminent government ban on disposable vapes. The study, funded by Cancer Research UK and analysing data from over 88,000 participants in the Smoking Toolkit Study between January 2022 and January 2024, reveals nuanced trends that could shape the future impact of vaping regulations.

Between January 2022 and January 2024, vaping prevalence among adults increased from 8.9% to 13.5%, while usage among young adults (aged 16 to 24) rose more sharply—from 17% to 26.5%. However, from January 2024 onwards, the proportion of people who vape appeared to plateau, remaining relatively stable. Notably, the proportion of young people using disposable vapes has decreased significantly—from 63% to 35%—indicating a shift towards refillable and reusable vaping devices.

This behavioural change has emerged in advance of the government’s forthcoming ban on disposable vapes, which comes into force on 1 June 2024 as part of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill. This legislation not only prohibits the sale of disposable vapes but also grants authorities powers to potentially regulate packaging, marketing, and e-cigarette flavours.

Dr Sarah Jackson, lead author of the UCL study and a researcher at the UCL Institute of Epidemiology & Health Care, commented on the findings: "Our results also suggest that the Government’s ban on disposables, coming into force in June, may have limited impact on vaping rates in general, given that vapers are already moving away from disposable vapes. It seems likely that people using these products will move to re-usable versions rather than stop vaping completely."

Dr Jackson also cautioned that stricter regulatory options currently under consideration could inadvertently hinder smokers from using vaping as a cessation tool. She explained to the Manchester Evening News, "Action is likely still required to reduce high vaping rates, but now that the situation has stabilised policymakers may be reassured that it would be sensible to avoid stricter policy options currently under review. Some of the options being considered may be more likely to have the unintended consequence of deterring smokers from using vapes to quit smoking."

Professor Caitlin Notley, Professor of Addiction Sciences at Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia, welcomed the levelling off of vaping prevalence, highlighting that it coincides with continued declines in tobacco smoking. She said, "As many people vaping will be ex-smokers, this suggests that we may be seeing a levelling off of vaping by people who have never smoked. This is clearly an important trend to monitor, as the public health goal is to encourage people away from harmful tobacco smoking, by vaping if it is helpful, but to also to discourage people who have never smoked from taking up vaping."

Echoing Dr Jackson’s perspective, Prof Notley remarked that the impact of the disposable vape ban may already have been felt as consumers have adjusted their behaviour in anticipation of the new regulations. "The study suggests that the forthcoming disposable vape ban may have already had an impact and any additional impact once it comes in may be limited, as people appear to have pre-emptively changed the products they are using knowing the ban was coming," she said. She stressed the importance of ongoing research to evaluate how full enforcement of the ban will affect vaping behaviours.

Alongside these shifts, concerns remain regarding vaping uptake among young people who have never smoked. Research cited from UCL indicates that approximately one million individuals in England vape despite no prior history of regular tobacco use, representing a seven-fold increase over three years largely driven by young adults. This highlights persistent public health challenges surrounding youth vaping.

Caroline Cerny, deputy chief executive of public health charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), reflected on the regulatory developments: "This data indicates that the Government's action on vaping is starting to shift both business practices and consumer behaviour. That's a positive sign and shows that the planned regulations have potential to tackle the trend in youth vaping. At the same time, it's important to strike the right balance: protecting young people while still supporting adults to stop smoking."

In recognition of evolving evidence on vaping’s health impacts, the UK Government recently launched a landmark review into the long-term effects of vaping. This includes commissioning a decade-long study involving 100,000 young people aged eight to 18 to monitor health outcomes associated with e-cigarette use.

The National Health Service (NHS) continues to advocate for vaping as a smoking cessation aid, citing the reduced exposure to harmful toxins compared to combustible cigarettes and an associated lower risk of lung disease, heart disease, and cancer.

The findings from UCL’s research contribute valuable insights into the complex landscape of vaping in the UK, underscoring behavioural shifts in response to impending legislation and informing ongoing debates about regulation to balance harm reduction and youth protection.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.betterretailing.com/vaping-growth-stalls-ucl-study-reveals/> - This article corroborates the stabilisation of vaping growth in the UK and the shift from disposable to reusable vaping devices, ahead of the government's ban. It also highlights the proportion of young adults using disposables decreasing from 63% to 35%.
2. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/jun/sharp-rise-vapers-using-high-strength-nicotine-england> - This study reports on the increase in vapers using high-strength nicotine, particularly among young adults and those using disposable e-cigarettes, which has implications for the impact of the disposable vape ban.
3. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/jul/substantial-rise-adults-vaping-longer-six-months-england> - This research details the substantial rise in adults vaping for more than six months in England, particularly driven by the popularity of disposable e-cigarettes among young adults and those who have never smoked.
4. <https://ash.org.uk/uploads/Use-of-vapes-among-adults-in-Great-Britain-2024.pdf> - This report highlights vaping prevalence among adults in Great Britain, with over half of current vapers being ex-smokers, and notes the role of e-cigarettes in smoking cessation efforts.
5. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/jun/sharp-rise-vapers-using-high-strength-nicotine-england> - The article discusses concerns about taxing vaping products based on nicotine strength and its potential impact on smokers trying to quit, which is relevant to regulatory discussions.
6. <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20241003/Study-reveals-sharp-increase-in-vaping-among-never-regular-smokers-in-England.aspx> - This study documents the sharp increase in vaping among never-regular smokers in England, primarily driven by young adults, and raises concerns about the public health implications.
7. <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/health/vape-ban-limited-effect-surge-31436805> - Please view link - unable to able to access data