

Teen Vaping Doubles Since 2017, But There's a Silver Lining



By Alex Berezow, PhD — September 19, 2019



Credit: Public Domain/Wikipedia [1]

Teenagers are rebellious and they do stupid things. This is a fact of life that we have to accept, whether we like it or not.

Go to Google and search for "[stupid things teenagers do](#) [2]." You'll be enlightened by the results, particularly if you were too drunk to remember the stupid things you did as a teenager. Oftentimes, the article includes a lamentation along the lines of, "I hope my kids won't do what I did."

The following is just a sample of the idiotic things that teens have done and will continue to do: Unprotected sex, binge drink, drink and drive, drive recklessly, experiment with hard drugs, smoke cigarettes, smoke marijuana, smoke hookah. Thanks to the internet, they invent new stupid things to do and then share them with others. That's how teens ended up [eating Tide pods and snorting condoms](#) [3].

Any realistic conversation about public health and teen safety must begin with that basic understanding.

Teen Vaping Doubles Since 2017

A new [study](#) [4] shows that the rate of teen vaping has doubled since 2017. Specifically, 25% and 20% of seniors and sophomores in high school, respectively, have vaped within the past month. That is unequivocally bad news. Nicotine is addictive, and long-term use of e-cigarettes is likely to cause respiratory disease, such as "popcorn lung" (the symptoms of which resemble COPD).

While this is not good news, it still must be put into context. In Europe, the rate of initiation of cigarette smoking among children aged 11-15 has [ticked upward](#) [5]. Smoking is extremely

unhealthy, so between the two, vaping is preferable. The silver lining is that teen vapers are preferable to teen smokers. As I wrote [previously](#) ^[6], we shouldn't treat all vices as equally bad:

"No responsible parent wants his kid to use any type of drug ever, but that doesn't change the fact that marijuana is safer than heroin. If a rebellious teenager is hellbent on trying drugs, I would much rather him puff the magic dragon than try heroin. While the former might kill a few brain cells, the latter could land him in the morgue.

"The same reasoning applies to sex. No responsible parent wants his teenager doing the horizontal tango. But if he does, protected sex using a condom is better than unprotected sex. Likewise, no responsible parent wants his kid to smoke or vape, but between the two, vaping is the safer option. Pretending that both are equally unsafe ignores science and is counterproductive to public health."

Of course, efforts should be made to prevent teens from acquiring vaping devices. In particular, (1) manufacturers must be banned from marketing to teens; (2) merchants must be banned from selling e-cigarettes to minors; and (3) vaping products should be thought of (and perhaps regulated as) medical devices for the sole purpose of smoking cessation.

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Links

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolescence#/media/File:Frank_Duveneck_-_The_Cobbler%E2%80%99s_Apprentice.jpg

[2] <https://www.google.com/search?q=stupid+things+teenagers+do&aq=stupid+things+teenagers+do>

[3] <https://www.insider.com/dumb-teens-tide-pod-condom-challenge-2018-3>

[4] <https://www.drugabuse.gov/news-events/news-releases/2019/09/teen-e-cigarette-use-doubles-2017>

[5] <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0201881>

[6] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/09/13/more-european-kids-are-smoking-if-only-there-was-alternative-13403>