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Exploratory Research on Youth Vaping

Health Canada

Final Report

May 2020

Prepared for:

Health Canada

Supplier Name: Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

Contract Award Date: January 20, 2020

Delivery Date: May 2020

Contract Amount (incl. HST): \$174,871.29

Contract #: HT372-194121/001/CY

POR Number: 069-19

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

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This public opinion research report presents the results of focus groups conducted by Quorus Consulting Group on behalf of Health Canada. The research study was done using qualitative focus groups. The research entailed a total of 16 in-facility focus groups conducted with occasional and regular youth who vape and with educators. The research was conducted between March 2 and March 12, 2020.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Recherche exploratoire sur le vapotage chez les jeunes

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Catalogue Number:
H14-347/2020E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN):
ISBN 978-0-660-34694-6

Related publications (registration number: POR 069-19):
H14-347/2020F-PDF (Final Report, French)
ISBN: 978-0-660-34695-3

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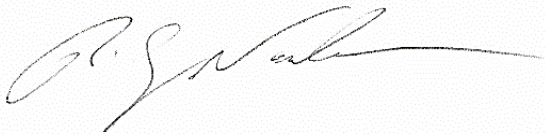


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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Nadeau", is written over a light gray, textured rectangular background.

Rick Nadeau, President
Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

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Executive Summary

Background and Research Objectives

The *Tobacco and Vaping Products Act* (TVPA) came into force on May 23, 2018, to regulate the manufacture, sale, labelling and promotion of tobacco products and vaping products sold in Canada. The TVPA creates a new legal framework for regulating vaping products to protect young persons from nicotine addiction and tobacco use, while allowing adults to legally access vaping products as a less harmful alternative to tobacco.

Though scientific knowledge is still emerging, Health Canada recognizes that vaping products could bring public health benefits if they reduce tobacco-related death and disease by helping smokers quit or switch completely to a less harmful source of nicotine. However, vaping products could also bring public health harms.

This exploratory research was conducted to gain clarity and understanding regarding how youth are using vaping products, the behaviours of a youth vaper, as well as the differences between those who use products regularly versus those who use them occasionally. This research will be used to help inform policy and regulatory decision making in addition to helping Health Canada have a more fulsome understanding of the phenomenon of vaping among youth and among those around youth, namely educators.

Methodology

This report is based on 16 in-person focus groups that Quorus completed between March 2 and March 12, 2020. Four focus groups were held in four cities, with one session in each city consisting of educators, one with young participants 13 to 15 years of age and two sessions with youth 16 to 19 years of age. The sessions with young participants consisted of individuals who occasionally or regularly vape, and of “experimenters” (i.e. they have vaped in the past and have not completely ruled out vaping in the future). Among youth, one session was with regular vapers and one with occasional vapers. In total, 103 youth 13 to 19 years old and 36 educators participated in the focus groups. English sessions were held in Regina, Vancouver, and Toronto and French sessions were held in Montreal. More details can be found in the Methodology section of the report.

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. These results must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion because they are not statistically projectable.

Research Results Among Youth

General Observations on Life as a Student

To begin each session with youth, the moderator explored what “life was like as a student/ a teenager these days.” Youth explained that life was challenging in many respects including facing pressure to perform at school, pressure to figure out their future, and social pressures, especially fitting in. Balancing schoolwork with other obligations (e.g. sports, a part-time job, etc.) was also a challenge for many. Participants often needed to be prompted to identify what was going well, which typically led youth to explain that they enjoy spending time with friends, the freedom they have as teenagers despite various obligations, and that they are going through a lifestage that allows them to discover and experiment.

Initiation to Vaping

When they think back to the first time they vaped, youth remembered that the opportunity to vape was almost always presented to them rather than being sought out. While most willingly went along, some needed to be asked a few times before they accepted. The invitation was quite often presented by someone well known to them (e.g. a friend, a sibling) and was often at a gathering of friends. If anything, youth decided to try vaping out of curiosity, to fit in, be cool or feel a little rebellious. Even though they did not know much about vaping at the time, most had seen it around them and few felt they were taking a big risk.

The first time was rarely a pleasant experience. Many remembered coughing, feeling ill or nauseated, or not feeling anything. Most admitted that they needed to learn how to vape and only then did they come to discover “what the hype was all about”, especially the head rush.

Current Vaping Patterns

Most **regular vapers** would say that they vape at least once a day, with many vaping first thing in the morning. It is among regular vapers that we will find individuals who are most likely to consider themselves “addicts.” Some of the most frequent vapers will often create opportunities to vape (e.g. bathroom breaks, vape in the classroom). Nearly all these youth own a vape and will almost always be vaping a product with at least 50mg of nicotine. Regular vapers seemed just as likely to vape on their own as they would be with friends or socially.

Occasional vapers are, by and large, social and convenience vapers. They very rarely vape by themselves and most do not own their own vape. They vape if the opportunity presents itself or, if they vape very rarely, at a social gathering. What they vape will largely depend on whether they own their own vape. Those who do are almost always vaping a product with at least 50mg of nicotine. Those who do not will find themselves vaping whatever is offered. Because they don’t vape all that much anyway, these vapers are less concerned with what is in the vape.

It is among occasional vapers that we are most likely to find youth who are vaping lower levels of nicotine, who are vaping because they might enjoy the flavour or who are vaping mostly because they enjoy the activity and not because they feel they need to do it.

Vaping at School

Most youth, especially regular vapers, vape at school. They will explain that students vape “everywhere,” including the classroom but especially in bathrooms and the yard, and that students are undeterred by any efforts by their school to control vaping. Circumventing rules is easy for them because of the increasingly compact size of vapes, they can inhale the vapour without letting any out, fruity or sweet odours are passed off as candy or gum, and vaping can happen very quickly.

Furthermore, many students believe that teachers are turning a blind eye to the behaviour because it is so common and it is not all that disturbing. They are not seeing many students being disciplined for vaping, leading most to believe that the rules are in place but they are not strictly enforced.

Attitudes About Vaping

Regular vapers are more likely than occasional vapers to feel that vaping is important to them personally. Those who feel vaping is important to them personally are inclined to feel that it is about as important to them as eating and breathing and that if vaping were to disappear tomorrow, they would have trouble coping for a number of weeks. These youth acknowledge they rely on vaping and that if they do not vape regularly, they recognize a variety of withdrawal effects (e.g. irritability, difficulty concentrating). Similarly, some who place a high importance on vaping explained that it allows them to manage anxiety, manage stress, and cope in general. Some also explained that vaping is an important social enabler.

Those who do not believe that vaping is important to them personally explained that they vape so rarely that even if it were to disappear tomorrow, they would hardly notice it and that it would be quite easy for them to quit. To them, vaping is like a snack, a chocolate bar or dessert - they enjoy having it from time to time and it is an indulgence or a nice “treat” when it happens but they do not feel they need to have it to get by.

By far the “best thing about vaping” is the head rush. This underscores the importance many place on vaping products with 50mg of nicotine, which most recognize as being one of the highest levels of nicotine they can get in Canada. A distant second in terms of the best thing about vaping are the flavours, followed by “cool clouds / vape tricks”, and how convenient vaping is, especially compared to cigarettes.

Vaping makes most youth feel “relaxed,” but some also believe it makes them feel high and lightheaded while for others it made them feel lethargic. For another group, vaping seems to energize them.

For some, the best thing about vaping was having something in common with friends and fitting in, and vaping makes them feel like they are part of a community, cool or accepted.

Perceptions of Risk

All participants seemed to agree there is some element of risk to vaping; however, many were hesitant and vague when asked to explain what they saw as the exact risks. Many suspected that vaping is just generally unhealthy and that there is a risk of addiction but they were still left wondering: If it was so risky, why are so many people doing it?

Some youth are starting to see or feel effects on their health that they attribute to vaping, especially those who vape more regularly and among those who have tried to quit. One of the more recognizable effects is addiction, something they or someone they know were experiencing. The discussion revealed that some did not consider nicotine addiction as a significant threat to their health, and unlike being addicted to certain drugs or alcohol, they didn't feel any stigma associated with being addicted to nicotine or vaping. Conversely, some were more concerned with addiction because they didn't like the idea of becoming dependent on a substance, they were concerned with the physical and psychological impact that this dependence has on a person, and in the end, they were worried about the issues and difficulty often associated with trying to quit something to which one is addicted.

There was some awareness among youth that vaping had originally been positioned as a strategy to help smokers quit smoking, leaving them with the impression that vaping was “safer” or “healthier” when compared to smoking cigarettes. Something else that left some feeling that vaping was fairly safe was the lack of authoritative evidence proving that it is harmful. The only serious cases they might have heard about were incidents on the news or on Facebook, most of which referenced individuals in the United States. While some were left quite worried about these incidents, others seemed quite dismissive, arguing that they were isolated cases of people who probably vape far more than they do and that they were vaping questionable products. Some youth also argued that if vaping were harmful, there would be far more cases of users being hospitalized or getting sick.

In terms of other possible risks, a few noted getting caught and reprimanded by teachers and/or parents, letting their parents down, and, the financial costs of vaping.

When asked to rate how harmful various substances and activities might be to their health, vaping with nicotine was considered less harmful than smoking cigarettes and considered

roughly as harmful as drinking alcohol. Vaping with nicotine was by far considered more harmful than vaping without nicotine, which, among the list of activities and substances listed, was rated by youth as one of the least harmful for their health.

Product Preferences

A considerable amount of time was dedicated to exploring the types of devices that youth own and what types of products they vape, with a focus on nicotine levels and flavours.

Many youth, especially regular vapers, owned their own vaping device. The most common reasons for wanting to own a device are that they are easy to get, that it is popular and cool to own one's own vape, they can vape what they want and when they want, and, that sharing is increasingly frowned upon because it is unhealthy, "mooching" is seen as socially unacceptable, and, those who own their own device are less inclined to share because products are so expensive.

Youth explained that, irrespective of their age, if they needed to get a device tomorrow, it would be "very easy," something in which younger participants seemed to take pride. Strategies used or witnessed included buying one at a local retailer (especially convenience stores) who is not verifying proof of age, using a fake ID, asking an older friend, student at school or sibling to buy one, waiting outside stores and asking a stranger to buy one for them for a small "buyer's fee", buying it at school and finding one online or through social media.

When explaining why they might prefer one device over another, participants focused on ease of use, size, affordability of the device and the pods, how well it produces a head rush or clouds, if it is being used by their friends and if it is the latest style.

The topic of flavours came up at various points in each focus group. For a few, flavours (or their smell) were part of the initial appeal of vaping and enticed them to try it. As well, for some participants, flavours are one of, if not the best part, of vaping. If the taste of vaping were, overnight, to become bad, many believe they would definitely stop vaping, but if the taste were to be no worse than something neutral, then they would probably still vape because they value other aspects of vaping more than the taste, especially the head rush.

When it comes to the pods they are using, youth had no concerns whatsoever regarding their trustworthiness or safety, mostly because they are using store-bought products.

Nicotine, especially the head rushes it produces, was the main reason why youth vape. When they described how much they need to vape, youth fully acknowledge that they are actually addicted to or craving the nicotine in the vape above anything else. Youth are well informed regarding what the highest levels available are in Canada and almost unanimously use products with 50mg of nicotine.

Many in each group had heard of nicotine salts but few seemed to know enough about them to provide an explanation of what they are or what their opinion was of them. It would seem that many are probably using nicotine salts but may not even know.

Gateway Considerations

There were mixed feelings among participants about whether vaping had led them to using other products like cigarettes or cannabis.

When it comes to smoking cigarettes, very few smoked cigarettes in addition to vaping and fewer still believe they started smoking after they had started vaping.

Many youth had already smoked cannabis at some point and most explained they would have ended up smoking cannabis irrespective of their vaping. However, a few did point out that learning how to vape allowed them to more easily learn how to “properly” smoke cannabis, and, for some long-time vapers, smoking cannabis was the next “thrill.”

Multiuse Considerations

Many youth occasionally used other substances when they vape (not in the vape itself), in particular alcohol, cannabis and other recreational drugs. By and large, multiuse of vaping with other substances happened at parties and at smaller gatherings of close friends. Participants explained that vaping improves the effects of cannabis and of other recreational drugs and that the head rush they got from vaping tended to be better when they had consumed alcohol.

Cessation

The notion of vaping less had crossed the minds of many youth but it was only a priority for a small number of them. Many of those who did not see cessation as a priority tended to view vaping as a very casual activity that they could easily stop doing. Regular vapers not focused on cessation explained that their vaping was not a problem for them or for anyone around them and, seeing as they were enjoying it so much, did not see why they would need to curb their use.

However, some regular vapers did recognize that they were consuming too much or that they were even addicted and they were keen on vaping less or quitting outright. These participants tended to focus mostly on their health, in particular on concerns for their lungs. Some had also heard about cases in the news, some had felt their own health deteriorate because of their vaping and others did not like how they felt when they had not vaped for a while.

The extent to which youth succeeded in reducing their vaping varied. Two important barriers of quitting vaping were that their friends vape and the withdrawal effects.

Although most youth did not see cessation as a priority today, most expected that they will not be vaping “in the future.” They believed vaping was a by-product of their teenage lifestage and of the types of friends they have in high school and that this was not going to last as they reached adulthood.

Discussions About Vaping

Youth did not seem to recall having had many conversations about the risks associated with vaping, whether at home or at school. If any had been had, they were most likely to have been with a parent. Youth rarely found these conversations had much impact on their vaping since they did not provide sufficient evidence or sufficiently compelling evidence that vaping was harmful for their health.

If they were to search for information they could trust about the health effects of vaping, many would use Google while a few mentioned Health Canada, the FDA, or a teacher. Some indicated they would prefer to consult someone who has experience vaping or who has been vaping for a long time.

Government organizations like Health Canada were not however universally considered trustworthy or unbiased, with some sensing that the information from these types of organizations tends to be one-sided.

Research Results Among Educators

General Observations on School Life

Overall, educators feel students are stressed and busy and that they lack motivation and resiliency. Educators believe youth are “addicted” to their smartphones and social media, which are distractions that challenge their mental health.

Educators are also quite united in thinking that parents are not parenting like they used to. They feel they are not as engaged in their children’s academic life as they would like, and that they are allowing their children to get away with more. All of this makes it harder for educators to motivate and discipline students.

Attitudes about Vaping

While most educators may have had positive impressions of vaping when they first came across it many years ago, those impressions have completely reversed. They are now concerned with the extent of youth vaping, youth addiction to nicotine and news coverage of vaping.

Educators did not feel overly knowledgeable about vaping, with the exception of some student counselors and substance abuse counselors. Educators rarely talk about vaping with their colleagues and only a few have had conversations with students.

When asked to explain why they believe youth start to vape, common reasons proposed included: social connection, peer pressure, curiosity, to be cool / popular, to be a rebel, adults are vaping / they see it everywhere, it's a new gadget, and, to fit in.

When asked to explain why they believe youth continued to vape, common reasons proposed included: addiction, to be part of a crowd, to be cool, it is easy to hide or conceal, it tastes good, it feels good / head rush, and, to keep busy.

Incidence of Vaping and Measures Taken at School

Educators had either heard of or seen their students vaping, but most revealed it wasn't as big of an issue as other substance use or student-related issues. Most prevalent among the issues is student mental health, including anxiety, fitting in, and depression. Educators are also seeing students struggle with challenging home lives, lack of motivation, managing cell phones, and managing social media.

While vaping is more prevalent at school than before and certainly believed to be more prevalent than other substances in a school setting, some educators explained that it doesn't affect how students perform or behave in school, unlike marijuana or other substances, and so it is given a far lower priority from a student management perspective.

If educators ever saw a student vaping or about to start, they revealed they might confiscate the device, issue a warning, and/or send them to a designated smoking area outside (if there is one). Educators felt that students are much more casual about getting caught with their vaping devices compared to if they were to get caught with alcohol or drugs.

There was not a consistent approach to handling vaping across schools, and in many cases, the educators were not well informed about school-level rules and policies. The general assumption was that there *probably* was a policy in place at the board level. Provincial smoking laws were a common reference for where students could and could not vape and what the penalties were.

Notwithstanding student and substance abuse counselors, few educators would say that it is their role to formally intervene and counsel students regarding their vaping. Educators would sooner turn to counselors as the more appropriate resource.

Information Sources and Needs

Almost all educators feel they are not well equipped to deal with vaping - most of them only know what they see in the news, but they know that this is not enough. Educators also suspect that many parents are in a similar situation.

Educators were asked to write down any questions they had about vaping. Most of the questions educators had were about the health effects of vaping, how vaping compares to smoking cigarettes, where they could get learning materials for their students, what their involvement as teachers should be to inform their students, and, if there were effective ways to get the message across to students.

Ideally, educators would like to have someone other than themselves educate students on the potential harmful effects of vaping. In a perfect world, there would be student workshops with either an expert in the field, and/or a peer who can come in and give a personal story or a testimonial about how vaping has affected their life.

Educators were shown posters and brochures that were designed by Health Canada and used in the 2019-2020 Youth Vaping Prevention Campaign to inform youth of the risks of vaping. These materials received mixed reviews. Most agreed that students would not sit and read a brochure or stop to look at a poster that is full of text. The materials needed to “speak their language” and leverage mediums like social media, podcasts, “memes” and YouTube influencers.

Very few indicated that their school had hosted an event or activity specifically to talk about vaping. Among those who remembered a Health Canada event (mostly in Vancouver and Regina), feedback was positive.

Educators did admit that some of the resources (e.g. the activity sheet) would be useful for younger students (grades 6 or younger) and that the information sheets and brochures were helpful for them as educators and potentially for parents. They were not all convinced that parents would read the brochure, but it was better than nothing.

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Detailed Results

Background

The *Tobacco and Vaping Products Act* (TVPA) came into force on May 23, 2018, to regulate the manufacture, sale, labelling and promotion of tobacco products and vaping products sold in Canada. The TVPA creates a new legal framework for regulating vaping products to protect young persons from nicotine addiction and tobacco use, while allowing adults to legally access vaping products as a less harmful alternative to tobacco.

Though scientific knowledge is still emerging, Health Canada recognizes that vaping products could bring public health benefits if they reduce tobacco-related death and disease by helping smokers quit or switch completely to a less harmful source of nicotine. However, vaping products could also bring public health harms. There is clear evidence that nicotine exposure during adolescence adversely affects cognitive function and development. Nicotine is also a potent and powerfully addictive substance, particularly in youth. There are concerns that vaping products could potentially lead to nicotine addiction, the use of tobacco products, and the renormalization of smoking behaviours.

Research Purpose and Objectives

This exploratory research was conducted to gain clarity and understanding regarding how youth are using vaping products, the behaviours of a youth vaper, as well as the differences between those who use products regularly versus those who use them occasionally. This research will be used to help inform policy and regulatory decision making in addition to helping Health Canada have a more fulsome understanding of the phenomenon of vaping among youth and among those around youth, namely educators.

The main objectives of the exploratory research among youth were as follows:

- Seek a better understanding of the social experience of vaping
- Explore the following areas:
 - Awareness and perceptions of nicotine
 - Possible transitions to other nicotine products
 - How and where vaping products are used
 - Where devices are obtained and the perception of access
 - Role of vaping in their social interactions
 - Multi-use of vaping products with other substances

The research also included sessions with educators. When considering the research with educators, the objectives included, but were not limited to:

- Seek a better understanding of the experience of vaping as observed in the school setting and similarities and differences with other substances;
- Explore perceptions of vaping and their role with youth;
- Frequency of encountering vaping among their students;
- Steps they take when speaking to students about vaping;
- Information needs about vaping.

Methodology

This report is based on 16 in-person focus groups that Quorus completed between March 2 and March 12, 2020. Four focus groups were held in four cities, with one session in each city consisting of educators, one with young participants 13 to 15 years of age and two sessions with youth 16 to 19 years of age. The sessions with young participants consisted of individuals who occasionally or regularly vape, and of “experimenters” (i.e. they have vaped in the past and have not completely ruled out vaping in the future). Among youth, one session was with regular vapers and one with occasional vapers. In total, 103 young and youth participated and 36 educators participated in the focus groups. English sessions were held in Regina, Vancouver, and Toronto and French sessions were held in Montreal. More details can be found in the Methodology section of the report.

Where applicable, differences between age groups, user types (regular vs. occasional vapers) and by region have been highlighted.

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. These results must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion because they are not statistically projectable.

Research Results Among Youth

General Observations on Life as a Student

To begin each session with youth, the moderator explored what “life was like as a student/ a teenager these days.”

This discussion almost always started off with a list of challenges, obstacles and negative feelings. Youth seemed to find a shared, common ground when many of these types of points were raised by various members in each group. Many of the sentiments focused on the following themes:

- **Pressure around academic performance** – whether self-inflicted, or coming from their parents, students felt that needing to perform well in school was one of the more cumbersome challenges they are feeling these days. The importance of performing well in school was primarily driven by the fact that their grades will largely determine if they will be able to attend post-secondary education, what type of school or program they’ll be able to pursue after high school and ultimately, what type of career they’ll be able to pursue. Those who felt they needed to perform well in high school felt that academic success would directly lead to success in the workplace, and, conversely, if they did not perform well in school, they did not expect to get a good job after graduating.
- **Pressure to figure out a plan after graduation** – a challenge that older youth tended to voice (i.e. those at least 16 years old), was the challenge they were facing in trying to figure out what kind of career they want to pursue. Youth felt they were being constantly reminded, if not pressured, by parents, teachers and themselves to come up with a plan for what they wanted to pursue after graduating. Many admitted that this pressure begins soon after starting high school and is relentless throughout high school.

A few were frustrated that they needed to fit into the generally accepted social construct that has students progressing along a pre-determined path whereby they are expected to graduate from high school, go to university or college, find a job, etc.

- **Balancing school work with other obligations** – Some youth felt it was difficult to achieve the right balance across a variety of other obligations and personal priorities, which ranged from homework and other academic obligations, sports, a part-time job, tasks/chores at home, their social life and resting. Among older teenagers who are now on their own, their balancing act also needed to incorporate activities like paying the rent, doing all the household chores, buying and preparing their own food, etc. For these

students, finding and keeping a job added additional pressure to their already burdened life.

- **Not enjoying school** – some youth explained that going to school was boring and that the only highlight of their day was seeing their friends. These participants explained that they did not see the point in a lot of the material being taught, that the approaches to teaching were monotonous and that they lacked the motivation to do their homework or even go to school.
- **Fitting in** – some participants explained that it was difficult “fitting in” and finding their place in a high school environment where students were constantly judging others, where authenticity was in short supply, and, where double-personalities (one online and one in person) were common. The omnipresence of social media seemed to compound the challenges youth were facing on this front.
- **Social and “friend” drama** – participants, especially girls, would explain that they not only needed to manage their own personal challenges, but were also confronted with the drama being lived by others in their school or circle of friends. This was commonly referred to as “friend drama.”
- **Managing the transition from child to adult** – a few participants explained that they are struggling to manage the transition they are experiencing from childhood, where they receive lots of support and guidance, to adulthood, where they are expected to be fully self-reliant and independent. They do not feel they are getting enough support through this transition and that expectations from adults around them, especially teachers and parents, are too high.

A small but nonetheless noteworthy collection of youth across all the groups expressed important challenges in their own personal lives around bullying, troubles at home, anxiety, addiction and substance abuse, and struggling through foster care. Only a few mentioned they also struggled with uncertainties they have about broader socio-economic issues, COVID-19¹, the environment or the general direction in which the world or society was headed.

The moderator often needed to prompt participants for parts of their lives they felt were going well or that they liked. Feedback from youth on this front indicated that there are some parts of being a teenager that they are enjoying. Some of the more common themes included:

¹ The focus groups were held from March 2 to March 12, 2020 which coincided with the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Friends** – many participants stressed the value and importance of having their circle of friends. They enjoy spending time with them at school and elsewhere.
- **Freedom** – many explained that even though they have many obligations, they also feel that they have a fair degree of freedom. These participants would often look at what they could now do but could not when they were younger, such as go to parties, drive, etc. They would also look at the obligations that older adults face but that they are not facing yet, such as the daily routine of going to work (where you might be seeing people you may not enjoy seeing every day), worrying about bills, having to make payments towards a mortgage, etc.
- **Age of discovery and experimentation** – youth explained that they are going through a stage in their lives where they continue to discover many new experiences. They also feel they can allow themselves to do things, including taking risks, that they would not be able to or allowed to do as adults. They believe that some behaviours are more acceptable or forgivable because they are teenagers.
- **School is going well** – a few did mention that they enjoy going to school and that they are performing well academically.

Initiation to Vaping

Participants were asked to write a short story outlining how, when, with whom they were, and where they vaped for the first time (refer to Handout A in the appendix). They were asked to write this story using a fictitious name (referred to as our “main character”) so that, when the moderator read all the stories aloud, nobody would know the author behind each story. This exercise allowed youth to be open and sincere regarding the moment they first vaped, including how they felt and what was going through their mind at the time.

A range of circumstances and scenarios were described through this exercise. Two of the more common scenarios were the following:

- The uninitiated youth would find themselves at some sort of social gathering involving many or just a few friends and one of these friends would invite them to try their vape.
- The youth would be at a friend’s place and they invite them to try a vape that they either own or obtained from an older sibling.

Across the various “stories” provided, the experiences of the main characters revealed several main themes.

The idea of vaping was rarely if ever instigated by the uninitiated. Participants described how they were asked to try vaping, rather than actively asking themselves. Along these lines, nobody admitted to being alone when they vaped for the first time – they were always with someone else. As well, none of the youth purchased or obtained a vape in order to try it on their own for the first time. Finally, participants did not always agree to try vaping the first time they were asked – for some, the invitation needed to be presented a few times before they tried it.

Our main characters were often asked to try vaping by someone they knew quite well, usually a good friend. As such, vaping for the first time often happened in a trusting environment, involving someone or people that the youth already knew. In a few instances, girls explained that their boyfriends encouraged them to try vaping. None of the boys in the groups indicated trying vaping because of a girlfriend.

Vaping for the first time typically happened at a gathering of friends. This ranged from large parties to smaller, more intimate gatherings consisting of just a few close friends. Some of the less common settings would include a bathroom at school or the school yard, a public space like a park, or an alley.

Vaping for the first time was not seen as a risky endeavor. Although they had a sense that what they were doing was not particularly “healthy,” very few would describe the experience as risky. For many others, there was more of an element of rebelliousness and “living in the moment” associated with vaping than an element of risk. Many also explained that vaping was not seen as risky since so many people around them are doing it, people seemed to be doing it consequence-free, and there was nothing they had come across that would suggest that vaping was a risky behaviour in any way (contrary to taking certain drugs or smoking a cigarette). For some, the only element of risk was a concern of getting caught by a teacher or by their parents (especially among younger participants) and for fewer still, there was a concern that they might become addicted.

Many were attracted to the idea of trying a vape for the first time out of curiosity. Again, seeing so many others around them vaping, at school and at social gatherings, participants explained that they wanted to know why it was so popular – “what’s the hype all about?” They were also curious about the sensation – they wanted to know “what it would feel like” – especially when their friends were explaining the sensations they were getting from vaping, especially the head rush.

For some, there was also a certain element of peer pressure from their circle of friends. A few also explained that they felt they needed to try vaping to “fit in” or be seen as part of the gang, with some of that pressure being self-imposed and some of the pressure coming from others around them at the time.

Very few admitted that they knew all that much about vaping the first time they tried it. Even though participants were fairly certain they were not taking a risk, they also explained that they did not know all that much about vaping when they first tried it...but this lack of knowledge at the time was hardly a consideration in whether or not they should “hit the vape.” If anything, participants had perhaps heard that vaping was being touted as better or “safer” than smoking cigarettes.

The first time a youth vaped does not mean it was the first time they were exposed to vaping. Even though they did not know much about vaping by the time they vaped for the first time, they were hardly unaware of it. Most youth had seen it around them, including at school, at social gatherings, and for a few, at home where a parent or an older sibling vaped. They also saw all sorts of people at large vaping, they had seen commercials for vaping, and product displays at corner stores. Many also explained that vaping was quite popular in social media and they claimed that various celebrities were shown online vaping.

Few feel they knew exactly what was in the vape when they tried it for the first time. Youth seemed to remember if there was nicotine in the vape but not the level of concentration. They could also remember if there was a flavour or a smell to the vape, and for some they could vaguely remember the specific flavour.

Most youth explained that the presence of a flavour had little to do with them trying vaping for the first time. If anything, it made the experience more interesting or pleasant, but they don’t feel it was a determining factor. That being said, there remained a few who were specifically drawn by the flavour or the smell of the vape and they would recall it being a sweet or fruity type of flavour.

A few were attracted by the smoke clouds. A few youth were intrigued by the large clouds being produced by some vapers, including some of the fun that some had producing different sizes of clouds, blowing shapes and other various effects, commonly referred to as “vape tricks.”

The first time that youth vaped was rarely a pleasant experience. Many remembered coughing, feeling ill or nauseated, or not feeling anything (because they did not inhale the vapour, they just kept it in their mouth and blew it back out). Most admitted that they

needed to learn how to vape and only then did they come to discover “what the hype was all about”, especially the head rush.

Current Vaping Patterns

Participants were asked to explain what a “day in the life” looked like for them and where vaping fit into that routine. This discussion was fairly different based on whether participants were regular vapers (vaping at least once a week) or occasional vapers (less frequently than once a week).

Vaping Patterns Among Regular Vapers

Most regular vapers would say that they vape at least once a day. It is among this group that we will find individuals who are most likely to consider themselves “addicts.” Not all regular vapers would say they are addicted, however most of those who believe they are addicted are regular vapers (the few who believe they are addicted but only vape occasionally are those who are trying to quit or have grown increasingly uninterested in vaping).

A typical “day in the life” for many of these vapers would involve a combination of scenarios where they are vaping on their own and vaping with others.

These individuals will also vape first thing in the morning to get their first head rush of the day. For nearly all these morning vapers, vaping is the very first thing they do each morning, describing the morning head rush as the best one they will have all day. If they are not vaping upon waking, they will vape on their way to school or once they get to school and meet up with their friends.

Nearly all these youth own a vape and many would say they either own a few or have owned at least two or three devices in the past.

Progressing through the day, many of these youth will vape multiple times with some indicating they will vape whenever they can. Some of the most frequent vapers will often create opportunities to vape, such as ask to go to the bathroom, vape in the classroom, or take extra short breaks at work. They are just as likely to vape when they are by themselves and bored as they are to vape when they are with their friends.

A “vape break” might last anywhere from 15 seconds to upwards of 30 minutes, depending on where they are (e.g. vaping in the classroom is a very short activity whereas vaping in their bedroom while doing homework can be much longer) and with whom they are (e.g. vaping sessions are typically longer when they are with friends compared to by themselves).

These youth will almost always be vaping the same thing, which, often, is a product with at least 50mg of nicotine (which youth will just refer to as “50 nic”). If they happen to vape something with a lower level of nicotine, it will be because they are vaping from someone else’s vape.

Vaping Patterns Among Occasional Vapers

Occasional vapers are, by and large, social and convenience vapers. These youth very rarely vape by themselves and most do not own their own vape. Because so few own their own vape, they do not vape first thing in the morning and, if they do vape at all during a regular school day, it will be when they are with their friends. They do not necessarily seek out opportunities to vape, but instead may vape if it is convenient – in other words, the opportunity presents itself and they are with someone whom they feel comfortable asking to borrow their vape. For those who vape very rarely, they will only vape when they are at a party or a similar social gathering which may end up being one or twice a month or less.

Occasional vapers who do own their own vape are most likely to use it in social circumstances. These youth own their own vape because they feel that even though they don’t vape every day, they do it often enough and don’t want to always be borrowing from a friend.

The product vaped by occasional vapers will largely depend on whether they own their own vape. Those who do, are, like regular vapers, almost always vaping the same thing, which, often, is a product with at least 50mg of nicotine. Those who do not own their own vape will find themselves vaping a variety of products, with many not really knowing which product they are vaping or what the level of nicotine may be (although most would agree that their friends are probably vaping a product with 50mg of nicotine). Because they don’t vape all that much anyway, these vapers are less concerned with what is in the vape. Because they are “hitting” a friend’s vape, they trust what they are vaping even though they may not always know what they are vaping.

It is among occasional vapers that we are most likely to find youth who are vaping lower levels of nicotine, who are vaping because they might enjoy the flavour or who are vaping mostly because they enjoy the activity and not because they feel they need to do it (e.g. they want to vape because it is fun to do, to blow clouds, etc.). For a few, they own their own vape because they want to be able to control the nicotine level and/or the flavour.

Similar to regular vapers, a “vape break” might last anywhere from 15 seconds to upwards of 30 minutes, depending on where they are and with whom they are.

Vaping at School

Most youth, especially regular vapers, vape at school. They will explain that students vape “everywhere” and that they are undeterred by any efforts by their school to control vaping. If anything, students seem to be challenging and daring each other to vape in increasingly challenging or risky situations. Some even video record or photograph their in-school vaping achievements and share them online. A few students made fun of the fact that their teacher let them charge their vape because they thought it was some sort of USB device.

Students will explain that they vape anywhere they want in their school. One of the most common meeting places is a bathroom. If the school has a designated smoking area (or smoking pit) outside, this is also where vapers will congregate along with cigarette smokers. Otherwise, youth will say they vape in class, at their locker, in the hallway in between classes, in gym change rooms/ locker rooms or in parts of their school or school yard that are secluded or see very low traffic.

Students explained they believe it is quite easy to defy any rules or controls that their school tries to impose. The increasingly compact size of vapes has helped them circumvent the controls, with some easily concealed in the palm of their hand or inside their sleeve. Contrary to smoking a cigarette, which requires the smoker to let out a cloud of smoke which both smells and is visible, vapers explain that they have learned to “zero” their vape, meaning that they can inhale the vapour without letting any out. Even if they do exhale and the teacher notices a smell of fruit, this is simply passed off as candy or gum. Finally, vaping can happen very quickly which makes it easy for them to do it pretty much anywhere.

Many students have come to the conclusion that their teachers “don’t care” that they vape in school. They believe that many of their teachers are turning a blind eye to the behaviour because it is so common and it is not all that disturbing. Based on what they have seen happen to other students in their school, many seem to know that a student will be disciplined for vaping in the school or on school property, including having their device confiscated and maybe even be suspended. But they are not seeing this happen all that often and very few of those in the focus groups have been disciplined themselves, leaving most to believe that the rules are in place but they are not strictly enforced. Findings from the perspective of educators on this topic are presented later in this report.

Attitudes About Vaping

Regular vapers are more likely than occasional vapers to feel that vaping is important to them personally. This is not to say that vaping is vitally important to regular vapers – when asked to rate its importance using a scale from 0 to 10 (where a rating of 10 would mean it is extremely

important to them), on average regular vapers rated vaping a 6. Occasional vapers very often gave an importance rating of 0, 1 or 2, resulting in an overall average of about 2 among this segment of vapers.

Some of those who consider vaping fairly important to them personally explained...

- ...it is about as important to them as eating and breathing. These youth acknowledge they rely on vaping and that if they do not vape regularly, they recognize a variety of withdrawal effects including a change in their mood (often becoming more irritable), a change in their ability to concentrate and other physiological effects. Similarly, some who place a high importance on vaping explained that vaping allows them to manage anxiety, manage stress, and cope in general: “I vape, I'm addicted to it. So, I just accepted that, you know. I could die from this, but right now, you know [...] it helps. Yeah, it helps me cope.” (Regina, 16-19 year old regular user)
- ...vaping is an important part of their social interactions. While some of these youth also indicated that they are addicted to nicotine, some also indicated that vaping is important to their interactions with friends and seen as a key ingredient in their ability to maintain relationships.
- ...that if vaping were to disappear tomorrow, they would have trouble coping for a number of weeks. Some feel they would probably need to start smoking cigarettes or smoke more cigarettes in order to satisfy their nicotine cravings.

Those who do not believe that vaping is important to them personally explained...

- ...they vape so rarely that even if it were to disappear tomorrow, they would hardly notice it. Similarly, these participants feel they are not likely to vape more in the future and that it would be quite easy for them to quit.
- ...that vaping is probably equivalent to a treat, a snack, a chocolate bar or dessert. In other words, they enjoy having it from time to time and it is a nice “treat” when it happens but they do not feel they need to have it to get by. These participants see vaping as an indulgence – some even believe it is a teenage indulgence that they are quite likely to abandon when they are an adult or go to university.

The extent to which vaping was considered important did not seem to vary much between young vapers (between 13 and 15 years old) and those between 16 and 19 years old. The regularity with which they vape was more of a determining factor than age. Similarly, younger vapers did not seem to have different reasons for valuing vaping compared to older vapers.

While youth did have very diverse opinions about how important vaping was to them personally, they all seemed very united in terms of what they see as the best thing about vaping and how vaping makes them feel.

By far the **“best thing about vaping”** is the head rush, the “buzz” or the “rush” (commonly referred to as the “headie”). This underscores the importance many place on vaping products with 50mg of nicotine, which most recognize as being one of the highest levels of nicotine they can get in Canada. When asked if they ever vape at low levels of nicotine (e.g. zero or 3), some youth reacted by simply saying “what’s the use of that!”

- The head rush is so important to some that, having developed a tolerance to the nicotine, they have intentionally taken vaping breaks of a few weeks just so that when they start back up, they can rediscover the head rushes.
- A distant second in terms of the best thing about vaping are the flavours, followed by “cool clouds / vape tricks”, and how convenient vaping is, especially compared to cigarettes. The convenience is best explained by the compact nature of the devices and that one can vape anywhere, which cannot be said for smoking a cigarette.
- A few also indicated the social aspect of vaping, feeling that vaping is something they have in common with their friends and for a few, that it helps them fit in and feel accepted.

When it comes to explaining **“how vaping makes them feel”** the overwhelming feeling is “relaxed.” Youth used a variety of terms to convey the same idea, including: stress-free, chill, calm, at ease, and clear-headed.

- Some youth explained that it makes them feel high, lightheaded, funky or “floaty”, while for others it made them feel lethargic, slumped, or “heavy.”
- For another group, vaping seems to energize them – these participants use terms like exhilarated, energetic, a rush, motivated, alive, euphoric, excited, stimulated, happy, and “full of life.”
- Many will simply say that vaping makes them feel “good” (or “bien” in French) and only a few will say that they don’t feel anything when they vape.
- Some participants alluded to the social aspect of vaping, indicating that vaping makes them feel accepted, “part of a community,” that they fit in the friend group, and cool.

Perceptions of Risk

Another aspect of vaping on which all participants seemed to agree was that there is some element of risk to vaping. There was widespread uncertainty regarding the health-related effects of vaping. As certain as they were that there are risks, participants were often hesitant and vague when asked to explain what they saw as the exact risks. Many suspected that vaping has an impact on their lungs, that vaping is just generally unhealthy, that there are probably long-term risks, and that there is a risk of addiction. However, the way that many provided their responses suggests that they were not confident in their knowledge about the health-related risks of vaping – many generalized and others seemed to be guessing at what could be the health-related impacts. One of the more common questions youth seemed to be asking themselves was: If it was so risky, why are so many people doing it?

Not all opinions related to the health-related risks of vaping were guesswork. Besides addiction, some youth are starting to see or feel other effects on their health that they attribute to vaping, especially those who vape more regularly and among those who have tried to quit. Some of the symptoms they highlighted included: shortness of breath / trouble breathing, low energy/their stamina is drained, an inability to concentrate, shortened attention span, pain in their lungs, coughing, and feeling “nic sick.” Those who play competitive sports or exercise regularly were especially likely to mention they were having more challenges breathing compared to when they did not vape – these types of vapers also seemed more motivated to reduce or quit their vaping. One participant explained that their trouble breathing has led to less exercise and weight gain.

The possibility of addiction did seem to resonate with youth. This was one of the more common answers given when asked what they saw as “the worst thing about vaping.” It is quite likely that this risk struck a particular chord with participants because they were witnessing it firsthand. Either they were addicted and/or many knew someone who had become addicted to nicotine through vaping. In each session, two predominant opposing attitudes towards nicotine addiction tended to emerge:

- Even though they might see it is a negative aspect of vaping, some youth were not concerned with being or becoming addicted to nicotine through vaping. They did not necessarily consider nicotine addiction as a significant threat to their health. A few seemed to believe that nicotine itself is not toxic or harmful to their health even though some had argued that they have become “nic sick” at times.

In terms of how others might see them, youth explained that being addicted to nicotine was not the same as being addicted to certain drugs or alcohol – they didn’t feel any stigma associated with being addicted to nicotine or vaping and it is just not as dire, worrisome or threatening as being addicted to other substances: “Like being addicted to

vaping isn't that bad of a thing to be addicted to when you think about it.” (Toronto, Youth 13-15) And contrary to being addicted to nicotine through cigarettes, youth explained there are no known consequences to being addicted to nicotine through vaping, vaping is not as socially undesirable as smoking cigarettes, and, rather than smell bad from smoking cigarettes, vaping can smell pretty good.

- There was also an important contingent of youth who were genuinely concerned with becoming addicted to nicotine through vaping. They explained that they didn't like the idea of becoming dependent on a substance, they were concerned with the impact that this dependence has on a person physically and psychologically, and in the end, they were worried about the issues and difficulty often associated with trying to quit something to which one is addicted. A good number of those who do not consider themselves addicted do not believe that their current vaping behaviour would lead them to ever becoming addicted. A few explained that they are being cautious in how much they consume out of concern of becoming addicted.

As well, it should be noted that not all youth who believe they were addicted to nicotine through vaping were nonchalant about their predicament. Some did not like that they were addicted and wished it were easier for them to quit or slow down, many having made unsuccessful attempts to decrease their vaping in the past.

There was some awareness among youth that vaping had originally been positioned as a strategy to help smokers quit smoking. This left some of these participants with the impression that vaping was “safer” or “healthier” when compared to smoking cigarettes. Whether or not vaping was ultimately seen as entirely safe, participants were often compelled to compare vaping to cigarettes. Those who believe that vaping should be innocent until proven guilty often argued that there is plenty of evidence that proves cigarettes are hazardous whereas no such evidence seems to exist for vaping, and that until such evidence surfaces, they don't see any real reason why they should not vape.

This general lack of authoritative evidence that vaping is harmful to users was a point often raised by youth. The only cases they might have heard about were isolated incidents and theories that they might have heard about on the news or on Facebook posts that their parents had shown them. This information often referred to specific cases, especially in the US, about people dying from vaping, about popcorn lung, and about collapsed lungs. While some were left quite worried about these incidents, others seemed quite dismissive for a variety of reasons:

- They argued that these were isolated cases.
- They were usually about people who vaped far more than they do.

- The victims were said to be vaping questionable products, such as homemade products, or products they had bought on the street. Youth in these focus groups did not believe they used questionable products.
- A few argued that the ingredient that causes “popcorn lung” is no longer allowed in vaping products and as such, that is not a legitimate concern anymore.
- Considering how many people vape and how many have suffered severe ill effects, a few youth argued that the ratio is extremely low. If vaping were so harmful, they argued that there would be far more cases of users being hospitalized or getting sick.

Very few remembered hearing anything about the risks or harmful effects of vaping at school from teachers or informational resources, and if they did, it seemed to confirm a lot of what they already seemed to know – which isn’t much and that the specific risks were unknown.

The extent to which some youth are indifferent towards the health-related aspects of vaping was seen through a participant activity in which they were asked to write down what they felt was “the worst thing about vaping.” Admittedly, the most common answer did refer to health-related concerns and uncertainties (e.g. impact on lungs, addiction, etc.), but a good number of participants gave answers that were not in the least related to health but instead spoke of certain inconveniences when they vape such as: burning their coil or “hitting” a burnt coil, running out of juice, having their device run out of power, getting juice in their mouth, or forgetting their vape at home.

Youth were hard-pressed to come up with any other risks associated with vaping. A few noted:

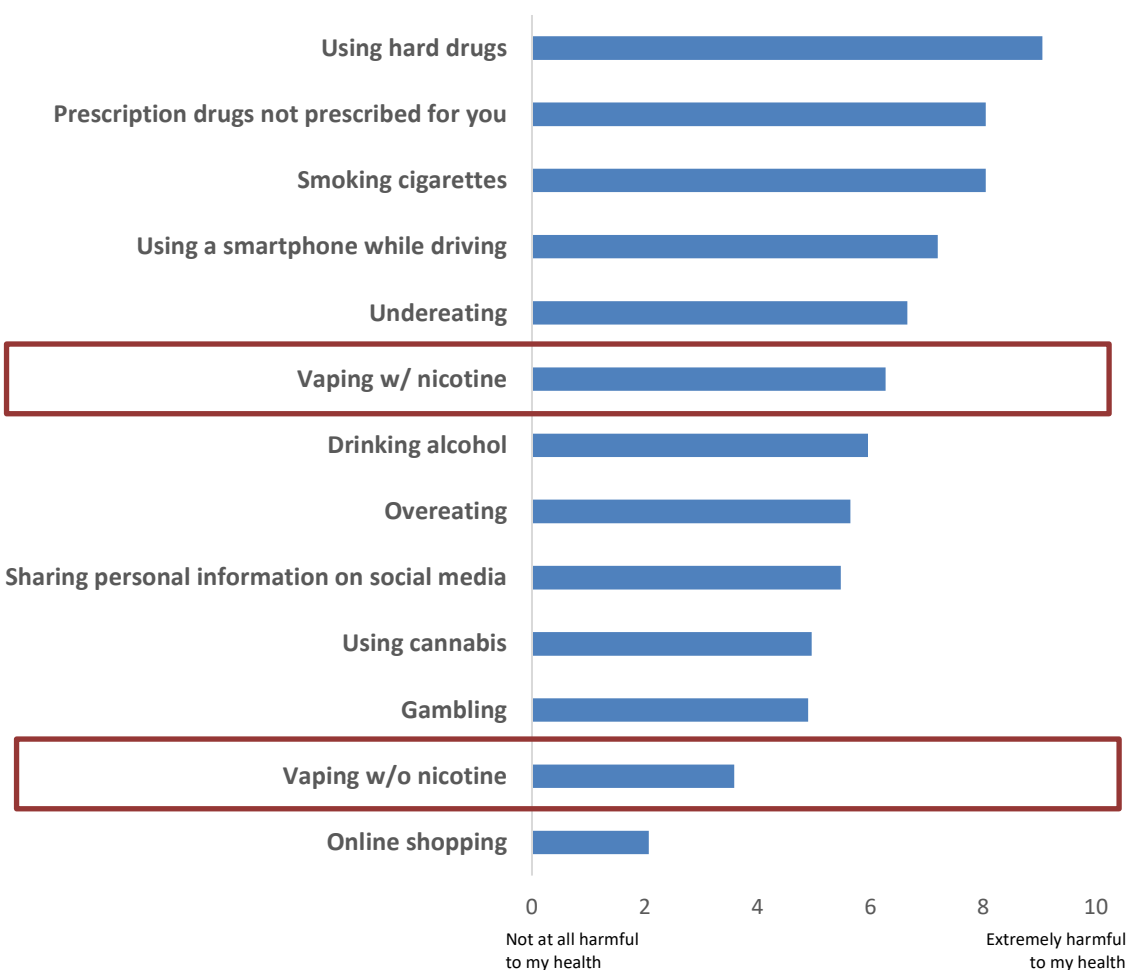
- Getting caught and reprimanded by teachers and/or parents;
- Letting their parents down;
- Financial risk from spending money on the pods/juice.

When asked to rate how harmful various substances and activities might be to their health, youth rated using hard drugs, using prescription drugs not prescribed for them and smoking cigarettes as the most harmful. Vaping with nicotine was considered less harmful than smoking cigarettes and considered roughly as harmful as drinking alcohol. Vaping with nicotine was by far considered more harmful than vaping without nicotine, which, among the list of activities and substances listed, was rated by youth as one of the least harmful for their health, above online shopping and below gambling and using cannabis.

The results are summarized in the following graph. Participants were asked to rate each item using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 meant “not at all harmful to my health” and 10 meant

“extremely harmful to my health.” As such, a high number for an activity or substance means participants considered it harmful to their health.

Perceived Harmfulness of Various Activities and Substances



Occasional vapers between the ages of 16 and 19 were generally more inclined to consider using most substances listed as more harmful compared to regular vapers in the same age group, especially smoking cigarettes, vaping with nicotine, using cannabis and vaping without nicotine. The only substance that seems to buck this trend in a meaningful way was alcohol, which occasional vapers rated as less harmful than did regular vapers.

Product Preferences

A considerable amount of time was dedicated to exploring the types of devices that youth own and what types of products they vape, with a focus on nicotine levels and flavours.

Devices Owned

Many youth, especially regular vapers, owned their own vaping device. The most common reasons for wanting to own a device were:

- It is popular, even cool, to own one's own vape. Similar to other gadgets like smartphones, youth enjoy talking about them, learning about what others are using, comparing them and showing them off. A few, especially girls, seemed to speak of them like they were an accessory, focusing on the colour of the device or referring to how their device was decorated.
- They no longer wanted to depend on others to vape – they can vape what they want and when they want.
- Sharing is increasingly frowned upon. It was explained that “mooching” is seen as socially unacceptable. As well, those who own their own device are less inclined to share because vaping products are so expensive. Some also indicated that sharing devices is not particularly healthy.
- Many own a device because it is easy to get one, with many inheriting used ones from friends or siblings. Even if they needed to buy one, this would be easy, irrespective of their age (more on this below). Some even get a device as a birthday present or it is bought for them by one of their parents. A few “found” theirs at a party.

Youth explained that, irrespective of their age, if they needed to get a device tomorrow, it would be “very easy.” They explained that there are many ways that they could go about doing this. This is a simple task for those of legal age who can go to any store that sells devices. In theory, this should be a greater challenge for younger vapers, but that is not the case. Younger participants seemed to take pride in the fact that they could easily obtain a device even though they are not of legal age to purchase one at a retailer. These younger participants listed the following as the many approaches they have either used in the past or could use if they needed a device tomorrow:

- They can buy one at a local retailer. Participants explained that not all retailers ask for proof of age, especially corner/ convenience stores. At most, they might ask if they are “of age” and take the customer's word for it.

Most seemed to agree that specialized vaping shops were stricter and more consistent when it comes to asking for proof of age, with a few saying that underage customers could not even enter the store.

- Youth use fake IDs to buy devices at retailers.
- They can ask an older friend, student at school or sibling to buy one for them at a retailer.
- Youth will wait outside stores and ask a stranger to buy one for them for a small “buyer’s fee.”
- Devices can be purchased by students at their school, again for a small additional fee.
- It would be easy to find a seller on social media.
- They can order a device online.

Unless they are inheriting it from someone else, for the most part youth indicated that they got their device in the original packaging. For many, they still own the box even though they have owned their device for some time.

Youth were asked to explain which devices they owned, or, if they did not own one, which device they would own if they were to obtain one. Participants tended to focus on one or two factors at most when explaining why they would choose one device over another. Across all youth though, a variety of factors were raised, including the following:

- Ease of use – the pods are easy to change
- Convenient, which usually meant it was small, easy to hide, easy to put in their pocket or carry around, and easy to use anywhere they wanted
- The device is affordable
- The pods are affordable
- Makes large clouds
- Produces the best head rushes, or similarly, allows for a high level of nicotine concentration
- Does not squirt juice
- It is what their friends use

- It is the “latest version” or the latest style
- Minor factors: variety of flavours available; there are digital features on the device; the device has a cool colour or pattern; it does not break easily.

A good number of non-owners would rely on advice from a friend or the retailer when selecting their device.

Flavours

The topic of flavours came up at various points in each focus group. For a few, flavours (or their smell) were part of the initial appeal of vaping and enticed them to try vaping. Especially compared to smoking cigarettes, vaping is seen as smelling and tasting much better in addition to being seen as being much healthier.

For some participants, flavours are one of, if not the best part, of vaping. This then led to interesting discussions regarding whether they would vape, or vape as much, if there were fewer or no flavours available. In reaction to that scenario, many felt that if the taste were to become bad, many believe they would definitely stop vaping, but if the taste were to be no worse than something neutral, then they would probably still vape because they value other aspects of vaping more than the taste, especially the head rush. These participants tended to argue that the pleasant flavours are a nice “extra” or bonus to the experience of vaping, and that they do not drive their desire to vape.

« Je pense que c'est plus pour ceux qui sont introduits. Alors nous tous on a déjà fait au moins quelques fois, alors pour nous, on a peut-être déjà notre saveur favorite, n'importe quoi. Mais pour ceux qui viennent essayer ça, c'est cool, c'est intéressant, il y a tant de saveurs et tout. Maintenant ça ne fait rien pour nous. » - Montreal, 16-19 year old occasional user [I think this is especially true for new vapers. All of us have been vaping before and some might have their favorite flavor, whatever that is. For those who are new at it, it may look cool and exciting, there are so many flavours to chose from.

But for us, it doesn't matter anymore.]

In the end, a small contingent would not vape if all the flavours were to disappear overnight – these tended to be more casual or occasional vapers.

Even if flavours were not necessarily the main reason they vaped, nearly all youth had a favourite flavour. When asked to name their favourite one, the following were mentioned:

<p>The more common ones mentioned were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berry blast • Menthol • Mango • Watermelon • Mint • Lemon drop • Blue raspberry • Passionfruit 	<p>The less common ones mentioned were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloop • Winter passion • Tropical Skittles • Cactus blue raspberry • Pink lemonade • Green apple / Sour apples / Apple • Strawberry • Lemon lime • Quad berry • Sour patch • Cotton candy • Cold punch fruit • Atlantis (like a candy) • Rootbeer float • Pina colada • Pineapple • Coffee
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Note: Spelling and flavour names are based on participant recall and may not accurately capture the real names of flavours on the market.

When it comes to the pods they are using, youth had no concerns whatsoever regarding their trustworthiness or safety. Only a few youth indicated they get their “juice” from friends who make their own and they did not seem worried. All participants who obtain their own products indicated they are using store-bought products that they are either buying directly themselves or that someone they know is buying for them. They look to the fact that the products are sealed, branded and, in most cases in their original packaging, as indications that the products they are vaping are safe. There is much more uncertainty among those who vape from their friend’s devices – they admitted that they had no idea if the products they vaped were safe or authentic but they were not particularly concerned.

Nicotine

Nicotine was the main reason why youth vape. More specifically, the head rushes that vapers get from the nicotine they vape are by far considered the “best thing about vaping.” Many would argue that there would be no point to vaping low nicotine or no nicotine vapes. Beyond the head rushes, some also argue that the effect that nicotine has on how they feel, including how it

relaxes them or helps them deal with stress or anxiety, further emphasizes the importance of nicotine.

When they describe how much they need to vape, youth fully acknowledge that they are actually addicted to or craving the nicotine in the vape above anything else.

- Youth feel they are addicted because they recognize that they have cravings – “it’s like an itch” – and they feel better after they vape. As noted earlier, they recognize a variety of withdrawal effects, including a change in their mood (often becoming more irritable), a change in their ability to concentrate and other physiological effects:

“I get like really sweaty and like, yeah, I’m going to get hyperventilated where you just want to go find something to do instead of vaping.” - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

“For me I just get really agitated if I don’t have it for a while. I don’t feel sick or anything. I just get a little agitated.” - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

As noted earlier in this report, youth almost unanimously use products with 50mg of nicotine, which are very well known as a “high level” of nicotine. Youth are well informed regarding what the highest levels available are in Canada, and that higher levels are available in the US. A few vape products with a concentration of 35mg and even fewer vape lower levels. Those who vape at lower levels tend to be youth who do not necessarily vape for the head rush – instead they are more interested in the social aspect of vaping, in making clouds and in the flavours. A few are using lower levels of concentration because they are trying to cut back on their vaping. Regular vapers typically do not change the concentration of nicotine that they vape. Those who do not own their own device and rely on others for their vaping will vape whatever is offered and so are the most likely to use different levels of nicotine. But even here, most explained that their friends all tend to use 50mg products exclusively.

Youth did not seem to build up to “50 nic” over time and many seemed to have started vaping at the highest level of nicotine. While some may have started off trying lower levels of nicotine concentration when they first started vaping, they seem to have quickly moved to 50 mg.

A brief discussion was had in each group on the topic of nicotine salts (commonly referred to by youth as “nic salts” or “salt nics”). Many in each group had heard of nicotine salts but few seemed to know enough about them to provide an explanation of what they are or what their opinion was of them. It would seem that many are probably using nicotine salts but may not even know. Perhaps one, or at most two, in each group seemed sufficiently familiar with them to explain what they were, how different they were from regular nicotine and which brands tended to sell them. These participants summarized the product as a more concentrated way of

delivering nicotine, which resulted in a stronger hit compared to regular nicotine products: “It just gives you a better buzz.” A few also seemed to feel that the only way they could get nicotine levels higher than 50mg was through nicotine salt – one participant explained that this is how he got to “100 nic.” As well, this type of product is not as harsh on the throat:

“For me I use salt nic for the high nic stuff because it's less of a throat hit so it doesn't hurt as much or make you cough.” - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

Product Awareness

Regular vapers were far more aware of the various products available on the market. Occasional and very casual vapers seemed familiar with maybe one or two brands. When asked to explain how they have become so familiar with the various brands, participants explained that “it’s everywhere!” As noted earlier in this report, most youth had seen it around them, including at school, at social gatherings, and for a few, at home where a parent or an older sibling vaped. They also saw commercials for vaping and product displays at corner stores. Many also explained that vaping was quite popular in social media and they claimed that various celebrities were shown online vaping. Youth did seem to think that they learned the most from other vapers around them, especially from their friends. Wherever they are, vaping is a common topic of discussion, especially if someone shows up at school or at a party with a new vape or a new juice.

Gateway Considerations

There were mixed feelings among participants about whether vaping had led them to using other products like cigarettes or cannabis.

When it comes to smoking cigarettes, very few smoked cigarettes in addition to vaping and fewer still believe they started smoking after they had started vaping.

- Among this small contingent, many believe they would have ended up smoking cigarettes anyway, mostly because their friends or their parents smoke. Only a few believe that vaping has contributed to them now smoking cigarettes.

Many youth had smoked cannabis. The research did not explore frequency so conclusions cannot be drawn regarding *how much* or *how often* participants consume cannabis, we can only ascertain that participants had smoked cannabis at some point.

Most explained they would have ended up smoking cannabis irrespective of their vaping, but a few points were raised regarding how vaping may have contributed or made it easier for them to smoke cannabis:

- Learning how to vape allowed them to more easily learn how to properly smoke cannabis.
- Those who had been vaping for some time explained that they got to a point where they were seeking out the next “thrill” and smoking cannabis was, for them, the next step.

Many felt however that cannabis just sort of evolved around them and they would have smoked it anyway.

Multiuse Considerations

Youth are using other substances when they vape, in particular they consume alcohol, cannabis and other recreational drugs when they vape (not in the vape itself). As noted earlier, the research did not explore frequency so conclusions cannot be drawn regarding *how much* or *how often* participants consume alcohol, cannabis or other recreational drugs. The research simply established that participants had consumed one or many of these substances at some point while vaping.

By and large, multiuse of vaping with other substances happened at parties and at smaller gatherings of close friends. Participants explained that vaping improves the effects of cannabis and of other recreational drugs and that the head rush they got from vaping tended to be better when they had consumed alcohol. For some, the importance they placed on vaping was higher when they were drinking alcohol compared to other times. Regular vapers will definitely vape when they are drinking alcohol at social gatherings, and for some occasional vapers, these are the only circumstances when they will vape.

Notwithstanding the combined effects of vaping while taking other substances, this research explored how youth want to feel by vaping, by drinking alcohol and by smoking cannabis (i.e. what is the goal).

- When it comes to **vaping**, youth are mostly looking to get the head rush and feel relaxed. This is a short-lived sensation measured in seconds and can occur at any time of the day.
- When it comes to **smoking cannabis**, youth are looking for a longer lasting effect that is usually characterized by feeling high, relaxed / calm / stress free, euphoric, dissociated from reality, with altered thinking. Some use cannabis to help them fall asleep.

- When it comes to **drinking alcohol**, youth explained that it is mostly to enhance a social situation and to have fun. They drink alcohol because it makes them more energetic, social / talkative / uninhibited / outgoing, and more confident. A few mentioned they drink just to get drunk and a few also indicated they drink alcohol for the taste. Those who drink alcohol will explain that this is almost uniquely a social activity, whereas vaping and smoking cannabis can be social or an individual activity.

There was good awareness and some use of vaping THC products, especially, but not exclusively, among youth 16 to 19 years old. They would refer to vape pens and dab pens that were specifically used to vape THC. A challenge that some raised with this product is that it is expensive.

From an accessibility perspective, youth explained that cannabis was far easier to obtain compared to alcohol, and this was irrespective of their age.

Cessation

The topic of quitting or vaping less was often raised spontaneously in the groups with youth. The notion of vaping less had crossed the minds of many youth but it was only a priority for a small number of them.

Many of those who did not see cessation as a priority tended to view vaping as a very casual activity. This attitude was quite common among occasional vapers who, by and large, felt that they did not vape enough for it to be considered a concern. They also felt that if they needed to stop vaping for any given reason, they all felt they could do it quite easily.

There was also a good number of regular vapers who, despite the relatively frequent nature of their vaping, did not see a need to quit or even reduce how much they vape. These vapers also tended to believe that their vaping was not a problem for them or for anyone around them and, seeing as they were enjoying it so much, did not see why they would need to curb their use. Some regular vapers did recognize that they were consuming too much or that they were even addicted. This tended to lead to two views on cessation:

- There were those who felt they were addicted and that they could not quit because they were addicted. They seemed to blame their inability to quit on their addiction and they seemed quite comfortable with that predicament – a common sentiment would be summed up with the statement: “I can’t quit because I’m addicted.”
- Then there were those who felt they were addicted or who, in their opinion, were over-consuming and who were interested in cessation. They viewed their self-assessed addiction as both a barrier and a motivation for reducing their use of vaping. In other

words, insight into their situation was motivating them to vape less (because they did not like the idea and feeling of being addicted) but also recognized that being addicted made it difficult for them to follow through. Some of these youth had tried unsuccessfully to reduce their use in the past, some were in the process of “trying to quit” and a few had succeeded in vaping much less and were now either occasional vapers or only vaped at very low levels of nicotine.

A few among this latter group of youth felt that there is a lack of information available to help them quit vaping. They argued that while there are many supports to help cigarette smokers quit, they did not believe there were any for vapers.

The reasons that youth provided to explain why they feel they should vape less focused mostly on their health. Across all the sessions, health-related reasons included:

- General suspicions that vaping must not be healthy, especially for their lungs;
- Hearing about people suffering from serious health issues and even dying because of vaping;
- Feeling that their own health had suffered because of their vaping. These types of symptoms, especially shortness of breath, were something that athletes tended to bring up as well as one participant who sings.
- How they felt when they did not vape for a while, e.g. withdrawal effects.

A few explained that they will or should probably reduce how much they vape because of the costs of the products (i.e. the pods / the juice). Cost is not a barrier for everyone however, especially occasional vapers who vape other people’s product.

The extent to which youth succeeded in reducing their vaping varied. Some have been successful, but many of these did explain that it was not easy. Some of the successful strategies used included will power, nicotine replacement therapies, and switching to cigarettes. Nothing else was uncovered related to successful cessation strategies whereas more time was invested in exploring barriers to cessation. One of the more important barriers that youth described in their efforts to quit was the fact that vaping is “everywhere they go” and that insofar as they continue to have the same circle of friends and that they all, or nearly all, vape, it will be extremely difficult for them to quit:

“And also, I think it partially depends on your friend group too, because back when I was addicted, I was friends with the people who hung out in the smoke pit or whatever. So, I didn't want to stop and lose the reason to hang out with my friends or whatever, because we'd hang out to vape and smoke

weed [...]. So, when I was quitting, I was: 'Do I really want to do this?', because I don't want to not have a reason to go hang out there at lunch and see all my friends. Like, that can kind of make it harder. It's not quite peer pressure but it's internal kind of peer pressure, if that makes sense." –

Vancouver, Youth 13-15 year old

Another major barrier raised was the withdrawal effects, which have been raised a variety of times throughout this report already. Youth recognized that they felt differently when they had not vaped for a while. These symptoms might manifest themselves after as short a period as a few hours, or they could surface after a few days.

"I have [tried to quit], but it didn't really work out that well. I ended up punching a whole bunch of stuff." - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

"I've been able to get myself two days without it entirely, but like a day, I'll start like tensing up and I won't be able to like get out of bed because of how much my body refuses to." - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

"It genuinely feels like it helps me function on a day to day basis." - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

Although most youth did not see cessation as a priority today, most expected that they will not be vaping "in the future." When asked what the future of their vaping looked like, many indicated it would be "non-existent" or they feel that it will only be something they will be doing casually from time to time. Regular vapers were most inclined to predict that nothing will change or that they may be doing it more often, although there were many in this group who also felt they will want to quit or reduce how much they vape.

When the future was discussed, some youth explained that they did not see themselves vaping in their twenties and that vaping was a passing phase. They believed vaping was a by-product of their teenage lifestage and of the types of friends they have in high school and that this was not going to last as they reached adulthood. Some also suspected that by the time they are adults they will have grown tired of vaping and that its novelty or "cool factor" will have worn off.

Discussions About Vaping

Youth did not seem to recall too many conversations they had had on the topic of the risks associated with vaping. If any had been had, they were most likely to have been with a parent. In these conversations, parents had either tried to dissuade them by showing them articles they had found in the news or on Facebook about the consequences of vaping. Youth rarely found these conversations had much impact on their vaping since they did not provide sufficient evidence or sufficiently compelling evidence that vaping was harmful for their health.

Very few youth recalled discussing vaping at school with a counselor or a teacher. If it had been discussed, it was during a course in which students were asked to do a project on vaping. A few youth remembered seeing posters in their school but they did not find them particularly compelling or realistic.

If they were interested in finding information they could trust about the health effects of vaping, many youth would use Google. Among the few who named specific sources, Health Canada, the FDA, and a teacher / a health teacher were mentioned. Some indicated they would prefer to consult someone who has experience vaping or who has been vaping for a long time.

“My brother in law, he's been vaping for like 16 years. I would say he's the most knowledgeable. So if I really wanted to ask any questions about the side effects, or what he's experienced, I would definitely go to him because I feel like not a lot of people have even known about vapes for that long.” - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

Government organizations like Health Canada were not however universally considered trustworthy or unbiased. Some youth did feel that government websites and organizations only showed negative aspects because they want to discourage people from vaping:

“I probably wouldn't trust everything that I read on there because obviously they don't want, you know, teens to vape.” - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

“On the subject of Health Canada, a lot of the ads we see on like YouTube and Snapchat, it's like nicotine being the devil, they are portrayed by like Health Canada. So why should we trust a study that would say all the negatives when we just want to know the truth.” - Regina, 16-19 year old regular user

“I don't think what the Government studies have put out so far are at all accurate because they've never done anything like this before. It's always been adults yelling at the kids for vaping, so the only place I trust to get any

information is from user response. And same thing with anything along these lines, anything that's kind of like considered rebellious, like drinking when you're young, smoking weed when you're young, because recently studies have come out with, especially weed and psychedelics, that it's not at all that bad for you, as people have always thought. So, I find instead of looking at studies, numbers and statistics, it's always more helpful to look at reliable people, like people in a discussion.” - Vancouver, Youth 13-15 year old

Research Results Among Educators

General Observations on School Life

Each session began with a general discussion about how things are for students in schools right now. The focus was on trying to understand the educators' perspectives on the kinds of pressures and challenges students face.

Overall, educators feel students are stressed, busy and have a lack of motivation. They also generally agree that the challenges the students of today face are different compared to those faced by students 10 or 20 years ago.

One of the biggest problems that emerged from this discussion was students' attachment to their smartphones and social media. Many educators described this as an "addiction" which is not only a distraction for their students but also something that adds pressure on their students. The additional pressure mostly comes from social media because they are "always connected", not only to each other, but to the world as well. In addition to this added pressure, they do not know how to be without their devices or technology.

Managing social media and their smartphones seemed to contribute to another big problem for students: mental health. Some explained that the role of social media in their lives seemed to be leading many students to lead two lives or two identities: their in-person identity and their online one. This behaviour underscores the type of stress that youth are facing, especially stress related to wanting to, or needing, to fit in and to meet expectations of those around them.

Educators believe that students are not motivated, that there is a growing sense of entitlement and that they are increasingly disrespectful towards teachers. They don't feel students are making extra efforts to succeed or problem-solve, that they lack resiliency (or "grit"), and that it has become increasingly difficult to get them to work or deliver on homework.

« Moins d'effort intellectuel, ils ne savent pas c'est quoi travailler avec la tête. On essaie de leur dire, fais un effort, mais ils ne savent pas c'est quoi travailler. » - Educator, Montreal [Less intellectual effort. They don't know how to use their heads. We try to tell them to make an effort, but they don't know what working means.]

Educators are also quite united in thinking that parents are not parenting like they used to. Educators feel they have lost the power over their students, as parents are allowing their children to get away with more. This is making it more difficult for educators to run their classroom the same way they used to. They also believe that parents are less engaged at home and are putting more of the onus on teachers to deliver on academic performance.

Attitudes about Vaping

To initiate the conversation on vaping, educators were asked what their first impressions were of vaping when they first learned about or saw it. Early reactions to vaping tended to be positive - most educators saw this as a good alternative to smoking cigarettes, it smelled good and it looked sort of interesting. Most agreed it was marketed to youth fairly early on but, overall, positive early reactions tended to outweigh negative ones.

As educators learned more about vaping over time, they began questioning the long-term effects and how this would specifically have an impact on their students. Their perceptions of vaping have considerably shifted and are now mostly negative. Seeing how much teenagers were vaping, the extent to which they believe youth are becoming addicted to nicotine through vaping, and the negative news coverage of vaping, especially serious illnesses and deaths among vapers, all contributed to this shift in perception.

“The other thing is to me it’s much more addictive than cigarettes, because it’s much easier access. Like, a Juul pod has about the nicotine equivalent of two packs of cigarettes.” – Educator, Regina

Educators were asked how knowledgeable they felt about vaping on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 10 meant they felt extremely knowledgeable). On average, educators did not feel overly knowledgeable, with perhaps one or two educators in each group feeling very knowledgeable – the overall average was roughly in the middle of the 10-point scale. Participants in Montreal felt the least knowledgeable, where no one answered above a 3.

- In a few sessions, some of the participants were student counselors and substance abuse counselors and these individuals were almost always the ones to feel the most knowledgeable. The discussion usually did prove this to be true.

Educators rarely talk about vaping with their colleagues - they generally agree that this type of conversation only tends to happen when there has been an incident with vaping in the school.

Some educators have had conversations with their students about vaping and find students are quite open to talking about it. Students reveal that they feel it is much better than cigarettes and they like the buzz. It is also something they feel is easy to hide which is an important factor for youth.

Educator Views on Why Youth Start to Vape and Why They Continue to Vape

The next exercise involved educators giving one or two words to explain why they believe youth start to vape. Some of the most popular reasons were:

- Social connection,
- Peer pressure,
- Curiosity,
- To be cool / popular,
- To be a rebel,
- Adults / influencers are doing it / they see it everywhere,
- New device / gadget, and,
- To fit in / acceptance.

To follow-up this question, educators were asked why they believed youth continued to vape. Some of the most popular words for this exercise were:

- Addicted,
- Socializing / be part of a crowd / want to belong,
- To be cool,
- Easy to hide or conceal,
- Tastes good,
- Feels good / head rush, and,
- To keep busy.

Most educators agree that these reasons are the same now as they were 5 years ago, but the prevalence of vaping is much higher compared to then. Because more youth are vaping today than before, educators believe that “acceptance” may be a more important factor today than in previous years whereas “novelty” may be a less common reason for starting to vape today.

“It's the same [as 5 years ago] but there's a level of intensity that comes with this now, it's just much more intense, I find. And it's so much more ubiquitous too.” – Educator, Vancouver

Incidence of Vaping and Measures Taken at School

All educators in these groups had either heard of or seen their students vaping, but most revealed it wasn't as big of an issue as other substance use or student-related issues. Some educators feel there are "bigger fish to fry". Most prevalent among the issues is student mental health, including anxiety, fitting in, and depression. Educators are also contending with students with challenging home lives, lack of motivation, managing cell phones, and managing social media.

« Ils sont tous anxieux, toute la gang. Toute la gang. On en a plein nous qui sont hospitalisés en ce moment. Ils partent, anxiété. Puis on n'est pas dans un collège élitiste, on prend beaucoup de jeunes en grande difficulté, ça fait que ce n'est pas une question d'anxiété de performance, c'est juste la vie. That's it, ça les rend anxieux pour tout. » - Educator, Montreal [They're all anxious. All of them are. Many are hospitalized as we speak. They quit due to anxiety. Our college is non elitist, we have many troubled youths, so it is not about performance anxiety. It's life, that's all. Everything makes them anxious.]

"My school is not even addressing it at all really, I mean, except for an individual incident here and there, because there's so much more stuff that we have to deal with. You know they're dealing with a lot of more important things; the kids maybe are harming themselves. Like, you said, suicide, anxiety, depression, all kinds of family struggles, are way more important to deal with immediately because they affect the behavior in the room, right. And kids can still learn while they're vaping, it is not good for their health, but they still learn." – Educator, Toronto

- Educators in Montreal seemed less aware of vaping among their students and generally felt that it was less common, especially compared to educators in Toronto, Vancouver and Regina. Educators in Montreal typically guessed anywhere from 10-20% of their students had tried vaping, and less than 10% do it regularly, whereas these numbers were about three times higher in Toronto.
- Perceptions of prevalence did seem to depend on the grade being taught – those teaching younger students, especially middle school (grades 7 and 8), seemed to think it was less of an issue among their students. As well, in Montreal, an educator who teaches CEGEP was not aware or concerned with vaping as an issue.

- A good number of educators did not have any idea that vaping was as big of an issue as some other educators made it out to be. These educators were hard-pressed to estimate how many students vaped, who vaped or how vaping might be handled in their school.
- Educators working in private or denominational schools did not seem to think it was much of an issue in their schools. These educators seemed to think that the rules and penalties in their school are so strict, that students do not take any chances.

Almost all agreed that smoking cigarettes wasn't a big issue at all, instead they felt that most students find it "gross". Alcohol would be more of an issue if they found it more, but this is not very prevalent in schools either. Smoking marijuana or using hard drugs would be a bigger issue. While vaping is more prevalent, some educators explained that it doesn't affect how students perform or behave in school, unlike marijuana or other substances, and so it is given a far lower priority from a student management perspective. In the end, educators seemed to suggest that prevalence of a behaviour does not necessarily translate into it being a significant issue for a school.

"It's probably more prevalent than cannabis or booze, but not such a big issue like everyone's saying because there's like bigger fish to fry. It's almost as if it's like, helps them manage and regulate themselves when they're doing this and it's like, then the behaviors are managed more, and then teachers have so much pressure and stress because they have all these, a lot of students with, you know, classroom issues like behavioral stuff." – Educator, Toronto

"I was going to say, just at my school, which is a lot more rural than probably any of yours, I'd say like vaping is probably the bottom issue, whereas like hard drugs are pretty prevalent. But it's kept so quiet that you wouldn't really know unless you knew what you're looking for. But like that is the main issue in our school." – Educator, Toronto

When asked if there was a specific type of student who was likely to be a vaper, most felt it was so generalized that there is no specific "type". Some felt boys were more likely than girls to vape and a few suggested that it might be more common among students who are struggling at home or at school, but otherwise educators seemed to think that vaping was mainstream.

If educators ever saw a student vaping or about to start, they revealed they would confiscate the device or at the very least give them a warning. They might ask them to put it away or, if there is one, ask them to go to the "smoking pit" or the designated smoking area outside. If they were to confiscate the device, they would take it over to the administration and let them discipline the student. Educators revealed they were unsure of whether the process involved a call to the

parents, saying this was the sole responsibility of administration. In some cases, there would be a suspension given to the student, especially if this was a recurring problem.

- A good number of educators had limited experience with this type of situation. Many had either never caught a student vaping or it may have only occurred once or twice in their career.

Some educators explained that confiscating an item that eventually needs to be returned to the student is an exercise in futility. Others explained that vaping is so common, that it is like fighting an uphill battle and that constant disciplinary action is not getting them anywhere. Some educators revealed that in some situations they would turn a blind eye, or quietly ask the student to put it away and go to class rather than discipline them.

"I don't know exactly how effective it is, like closing change rooms during break times and things like that. But so, there used to be a smoke pit. This is a long time, there is no longer one. And the idea is while you're not allowed to smoke anything on school property, but then this game keeps on going around and around where it's like if anybody sees you, we confiscate the vape. But then just come back and get it later. It's discouraging, and it's discouraging to keep on doing it. So, I know lots of colleagues that just go like, well, I just don't want to see it, just put it away because they don't even want to bother going through the hassle of it anymore when they'll just have the back tomorrow or the day after. And there's effectively no point." -

Educator, Vancouver

There was not a consistent approach to handling vaping across schools, and in many cases, the educators were not well informed about school-level rules and policies. Many explained that if there were rules, they had not been shared with them. The general assumption was that there *probably* was a policy in place at the board level, but that each school tended to deal with each incident in its own way. Some educators deferred to provincial smoking laws as their reference for where students could and could not vape and what the penalties were.

- Educators all seemed to agree that the rules and policies regarding marijuana and alcohol use at school or on school property were a lot more severe and more strictly enforced than those for vaping.

Educators feel that students are much more casual about getting caught with their vaping devices compared to if they were to get caught with alcohol or drugs. The casual nature of their demeanor is sometimes explained by the casual attitude their parents have. Educators explained

instances where parents were called in and upon arrival, told administration to give the device back to their child, with some asking “what the big deal was.”

Even though students are underage and legally unable to purchase these devices on their own, educators are confident that youth can always find a way to get them. They believe that they can get them at local shops with a fake ID, or even no ID and that the store clerks are just looking to make a sale. Some other methods include having an older sibling or friend purchase the device, buying them online with a prepaid credit card or Visa Debit card, and in some cases parents will even purchase it for their child. A few also suspect there are “entrepreneurial” students at school selling vaping products.

“It’s super accessible. Because I worked with a student who was 14 and called one of the supply stores here, set up an account, used a relative’s credit card, and had it delivered to the house.” – Educator, Regina

Notwithstanding student and substance abuse counselors, few educators would say that it is their role to intervene and counsel students regarding their vaping. Educators would sooner turn to counselors as the more appropriate resource for both students and for educators like themselves. Some educators believe that, given the prevalence of vaping, discussions about the products and the behaviour should be integrated into the curriculum in the same way that cigarettes and drugs are. If it is not part of the curriculum, many educators are not sure it is their role to intervene in any way other than through an occasional informal discussion with a student about their health and their well-being.

« Ça fait que pour l'instant le vapotage effectivement, c'est sûr qu'on peut en parler, mais [pas] de nous donner la tâche de le faire. Quand on voit quelqu'un fumer [...] c'est sûr qu'on va lui parler au jeune. On ne lui dit pas de s'en aller. Mais effectivement, les gens qui sont là pour ça en toxicologie, eux ils peuvent passer dans les classes puis faire de la prévention peut-être. Ce n'est pas à nous de faire de la prévention pour tout le monde. C'est à nous d'en parler si on en voit. » – Educator, Montreal [For the time being, we can talk about vaping, but we should not be forced to do so. When we see young smokers, we might talk to them; we won't send them away. Perhaps toxicology experts could visit our classrooms to work on prevention, but this is not our responsibility as teachers. All we can do is talk about it when we see it.]

Vaping Versus Other Substances

In their limited discussions with youth on the topic of vaping, educators have heard that students perceive vaping to be fairly safe, or, at a minimum, much safer than cigarettes. They have heard students discuss the safety warnings and images on packages of cigarettes:

“Students will say to me: I see on cigarette packages what it can do to me. I don’t see that with vaping. There’s nothing on there that’s going to show me that that’s what’s going to happen.” – Educator, Regina

“Well, they can walk into a store and see it all over the place, though. You can see the pods on the counter. You used to be able to. You can’t now. But before the first of February, you could go into any convenience store and see six or seven different vape devices, you could see the pods, and there’s no [...] surgeon general warning, people with no teeth or [...] no health warnings, nothing. And I find a lot of students are visual, right? They’re visual. If they see that picture, “Oh, yikes, I don’t want that to happen to me.” And there’s not that with the vapes.” – Educator, Regina

When they look at smoking cannabis, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and vaping, educators are quite certain that students are more likely to vape in the school and on school property. As noted earlier, educators are not really seeing students drink at school but they are seeing smoking cannabis at school as an important challenge for their schools although students are not necessarily smoking it in the school. Smoking cannabis and drinking alcohol are very rarely done in the school mostly because it is harder to do, or similarly, because vaping is much easier to conceal, it is easier to do in the school. Educators recognize that the vaping devices are small, that vaping does not leave an odour, and that it doesn’t alter a student’s behaviour the way alcohol and cannabis do. A few have also noticed that students are making vaping in school a bit of a game, which is not apparently happening with other substances:

“So, the more things you put in their way, the more of a game it becomes of cat and mouse you know, “I’m going to see how close I can get to the administrator and get away with this.” And so, there’s this whole thing around that. And they’ll tell me like, last year, we had students that said it was a game for them to try to get the teacher to charge their, their vape device, because a lot of teachers didn’t even know what they look like. “Oh, can I charge my USB, can I plug it in?” And then they would do a snap of it and then they would all send it to the school. So, you know the 2,000 students would have seen them getting away with it.” – Educator, Vancouver

Information Sources and Needs

What Educators Have and Know

Educators were asked what messages they communicate to their students when they deal with a student vaping. Some participants revealed they shared the harmful effects and some tried a similar approach to smoking. Almost all educators feel they are not well equipped to deal with vaping, especially regarding the health-related effects. Most of them only know what they see in the news, but they know that this is not enough - they would like more tools.

« Quand je vois un élève fumer, moi je lui en parle souvent. Mais le vapotage, comme tu dis, on ne le sait pas encore si c'est nocif, puis je n'en vois pas. Ça fait que tu sais, je n'irai pas rien lui dire même si je le vois vapoter. Je vais aller lui dire quoi? » – Educator, Montreal [When I see a student smoke, I go and talk to him/her. But as you mentioned, we don't know if vaping is harmful. So, I don't say anything. What could I say, really?]

When asked if their school had organized any activities specifically to talk about vaping, most educators said they hadn't. Some educators in Regina and Vancouver recalled that Health Canada had done an event for their schools which was very well received. Other than that, the only other vaping resource that educators could remember was posters.

Educators did remember seeing or hearing about other types of interventions or activities at their school to engage with students about other substances:

“We have the police come in and do classes, basically. Right from like grade one up on substance abuse. I feel that that's actually pretty effective. They come in in their full garb. And they can answer any law question. They can, you know, talk about being arrested or when they cannot do things and what happens when this happens. I find that they're actually a really good resource. And they'll go to any school, I think it's free of charge.” – Educator, Toronto

« Nous autres on faisait la Maison Jean Lapointe. Ils sont vraiment excellents. Puis c'est eux aussi qui font La face cachée des écrans. [...] Eux ils parlent des problèmes d'addiction. Alcool, cigarette, puis là ils ont commencé les réseaux Internet, Facebook, Instagram. [...] C'est des conférences dans le fond. [...] Ils ont tous des petits vidéos de faits vécus, ils ont un petit côté statistiques, les points positifs, négatifs. Puis après ça ce qui accroche le plus souvent les élèves c'est des témoignages : J'ai vécu telle, telle affaire, avez-vous des questions? » - Educator, Montreal [We used to deal with Maison Jean

Lapointe. They are excellent. They created a workshop called *La face cachée des écrans*. They address addictions, like alcohol and tobacco. They are also using the Internet and social media like Facebook and Instagram. They organize conferences and produce short videos of real-life examples, with statistics, as well as positive and negative aspects. Testimonies are particularly effective with students - for example: I went through this situation... Do you have any questions?]

Educators are also aware that counselors can come to their school to give presentations and information sessions but this only tends to happen if there is an issue at the school.

Educators suspect that not only are they ill-informed about vaping, but they suspect that many parents are in a similar situation. Educators seem to feel that efforts should be made to better educate parents about vaping so that informed discussions can happen both at home and at school.

What Educators Want to Have and Know

Educators were asked to write down any questions they had about vaping. Most of the questions educators had were about the **health effects of vaping**, such as the long- and short-term effects of vaping, the effects on lung health and physical health. Many questions arose about **how vaping compares to smoking cigarettes**. As educators, there were also many questions about **learning**, such as where they could get learning materials for their students, what their involvement as teachers should be to inform their students and if there were effective ways to get the message across to students. Other questions pertained to the devices, the costs, the ingredients in the device and juices, legal aspects, marketing/advertising, and government involvement. Some examples of questions included:

- What are the health implications - long and short term?
- What would be the most impactful way to deliver a message about the danger of vaping?
- What is the breakdown of chemical components and risks in the ingredients of vape juice?
- How do the devices work?
- Who approved and regulates laws of vape products (besides Health Canada)?
- What vape strength is equivalent to in “cigarette” terms, i.e. how does a vape hit/puff convert to in terms of number of cigarettes?

Ideally, educators would like to have someone other than themselves to educate students and youth on the potential harmful effects of vaping. They believe that students wouldn't really listen or process the information if it came from their teachers. In a perfect world, there would be workshops for the students with either an expert in the field, or a peer who can explain to them the effects of vaping. To have someone come in and give a personal story or a testimonial of how vaping has affected their life would also be an effective way to reach the students. Many educators were comfortable with the idea of someone from the government to set up this type of workshop. The workshops would be seen as particularly effective if there wasn't too much talking, and a lot of hands-on activities to engage youth.

"It's a multimedia, it's an interactive thing and students reported to me that they enjoyed it. There was a video component and there was some multi kind of, you know, trying to use the brain a bit to engage them instead of talking at them, which seems more effective." - Educator, Vancouver

Educators were shown posters and brochures that were designed by Health Canada and used in the 2019-2020 Youth Vaping Prevention Campaign to inform youth of the risks of vaping. The materials shown included²:

- Brochure: "Talking with your teen about vaping – a tip sheet for parents"
- Vaping awareness activity sheet: "Consider the Consequences of Vaping"
- Summary resource cover sheet: "Teens and Vaping"
- Tip sheet: "Talking with Teens About Vaping"
- One (1) static cling-on
- Three (3) posters

These materials received mixed reviews. Most agreed that they were not effective for students as they are not relatable or eye catching. Students would not sit and read a brochure or stop to look at a poster that is full of text. It was suggested that the materials need to be more relatable and "speak their language." Many educators suggested that something on social media, podcasts, "memes" or YouTube influencers would be something that would engage youth. A few of the educators noticed that some of the images of vaping devices were a bit dated and that the

² Resources can be accessed here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/vaping/awareness-resources.html>

brochure still suggested that vaping was better than smoking cigarettes, which was not a welcomed perspective.

Educators did admit that some of the resources (e.g. the activity sheet) would be useful for younger students (grades 6 or younger) and that the information sheets and brochures were helpful for them as educators and potentially for parents. They were not all convinced that parents would read the brochure, but it was better than nothing.

Concluding Thoughts

The life of a student, from both the perspective of students and educators, seems to point to various challenges, with mental health at the top of the list. This might manifest itself in a variety of ways, including stress, “feeling pressured”, anxiety, depression, social acceptance and fitting in (or the challenges associated with fitting in). Vaping seems to play a role, sometimes a central one, in how youth are managing these various challenges. With the added benefits, at least from the perspective of youth, of producing pleasant feelings (notably the head rush), of being fun to do, tasting and smelling good, and involving “cool” devices, vaping has a variety of appeals. If we then layer on the perception that, other than costing money, few seem to see any short-term or long-term risks in vaping, it may be challenging to convince youth that they should not vape.

There are some indications that young vapers are awakening to the harmful effects of vaping on their own, but only after having experienced it personally. This is best seen through those who self-diagnose as “addicted”, especially in their experience with withdrawal symptoms. In these cases, the physiological effects are more impactful on cessation intentions than any social stigma associated with being addicted to nicotine through vaping. The harmful effects are also striking a chord among those who seem to place a greater value on their lung capacity, notably athletes and singers.

Youth seemed open to getting “the facts” on vaping but they are also interested in getting the full story - they are interested in perspectives on vaping rather than directives. Anything that would come across as one-sided is not likely to be very convincing nor are they likely to be compelled by unilateral instructions to stop vaping. What seems to be more interesting, according to both youth and educators, are testimonials from experienced vapers in combination with studies showing the short, medium and long-term health-related effects on the mind and body.

Educators are in many cases flying blind when it comes to having discussions about vaping. Most do not feel well-informed on even the most basic aspects of vaping and would feel inadequately equipped to have a balanced discussion with youth about vaping. Despite this knowledge gap, many educators may feel that other issues are more serious and more deserving of their

attention, notably their students' mental health, cell phone and social media use and, in certain cases, dealing with other substances, notably cannabis and harder drugs. This is not to say that vaping should be completely ignored – most would probably agree that all stakeholders, including parents, should be better informed. They would probably also agree that until their knowledge gap on vaping is bridged, certain specialists, notably substance abuse counselors, consultants and student counselors might be the best resources to have conversations with youth and parents about vaping.

Methodology

The research methodology consisted of 16 traditional, in-person focus groups. Quorus was responsible for coordinating all aspects of the research project including designing and translating the recruitment screener and the moderation guide, coordinating all aspects of participant recruitment, facilities and related logistics, moderating all sessions, and delivering required reports at the end of data collection.

The target population for the focus groups are Canadian youth vapers, 13 to 19 years old as well as educators who interact with students from grades 8 to 12 (*secondaire 1 to 5* in Quebec), including members of the administration (e.g. a vice-principal) and student counselors. Sessions with youth in each city were split based on the participant's age and vaping behaviours as follows:

- Young regular or occasional vapers (age 13-15)
- Youth regular vapers (age 16-19)
- Youth occasional vapers (age 16-19)

Participants invited to participate in the focus groups were recruited by telephone from the general public as well as from an opt-in database. To augment recruitment, a general advertisement targeting people who vape was posted in social media channels and online but no specific references were made to the Government of Canada, to Health Canada or to the nature of the study in a few centres. Those interested in participating in a focus group were asked to contact the recruitment team and from that point on the full screening process was undertaken. Finally, on-site recruitment was used to intercept potential participants, 16 to 19 year old individuals³ were approached directly whereas 13 to 15 year olds were only be approached if accompanied by an adult. In order to recruit educators, lists of middle and high schools were sourced by the recruitment team for each urban centre.

In the design of the recruitment screener, specific questions were inserted to clearly identify whether young and youth participants qualify for the research program and to ensure a good representation of ages, gender and diversity within each segment. In order to identify regular and occasional vapers among young and youth participants, the following question was added to the recruitment screener:

- Please tell me how frequently did you use an e-cigarette (vape, vape pen, tank or mod) in the last 30 days?
 - Daily or almost daily - **Regular user**
 - Less than daily, but at least once a week - **Regular user**
 - Less than weekly, but at least once a month - **Occasional user**

³ As per Government of Canada as well as industry standards, participants at least 16 years of age do not need parental consent to participate in a survey or focus group.

- Less than monthly - **Occasional user**
- Not at all

To augment recruitment among 13-15 year olds, if they responded “not at all”, they were then asked if they had ever tried vaping, followed by whether or not they think they will try vaping again. Insofar as they did not respond “definitely not,” the participant was invited and considered an “experimenter.”

In addition to the general participant profiling criteria noted above, additional screening was done to ensure quality respondents, such as:

- No participant (nor anyone in their immediate family or household) worked in an occupation that has anything to do with a tobacco or e-cigarette company, smoking cessation, a legal or law firm, federal or provincial government departments/agencies, nor in advertising, marketing research, public relations or the media (radio, television, newspaper, film/video production, etc.).
- In addition, consideration was given to excluding a participant who has worked in any such occupation in the past 5 years, as appropriate to the specific research objectives.
- No participants acquainted with each other were knowingly recruited for the same study, unless they are in different sessions that are scheduled separately.
- No participant was recruited who has attended a qualitative research session within the past six months.
- No participant was recruited who has attended five or more qualitative research sessions in the past five years.
- No participant was recruited who has attended, in the past two years, a qualitative research session on the same general topic as defined by the researcher/moderator.

Data collection consisted of in-person focus groups, each lasting 2 hours. For each focus group, Quorus attempted to recruit 10 participants to achieve 8 to 10 participants per focus group. Challenges were encountered recruiting youth in general. Generally, youth are reluctant to admit to vaping especially those 15 years of age since they need the consent of a parent or guardian to participate.

All focus groups were held in the evenings on weekdays in focus group facilities that allowed the client team to observe the sessions. The research team also used a customized audio-visual setup (a microphone and webcam connected to a laptop inside the focus group room) to enable client remote viewing using Adobe Connect. Recruited participants were offered an honorarium of \$100 for youth and \$150 for educators for their participation.

The recruitment of focus group participants followed the screening, recruiting and privacy considerations as set out in the *Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research—Qualitative Research*. Furthermore, recruitment respected the following requirements:

- All recruitment was conducted in the participant’s official language of choice, English and French, as appropriate.
- Upon request, participants were informed on how they can access the research findings.
- Upon request, participants were provided Quorus’ privacy policy.
- Recruitment confirmed each participant had the ability to speak, understand, read and write in the language in which the session was to be conducted.
- Participants were informed of their rights under the *Privacy and Access to Information Acts* and ensure that those rights were protected throughout the research process. This included: informing participants of the purpose of the research, identifying both the sponsoring department or agency and research supplier, informing participants that the study will be made available to the public in 6 months after field completion through Library and Archives Canada, and informing participants that their participation in the study is voluntary and the information provided will be administered according to the requirements of the *Privacy Act*.

At the recruitment stage and at the beginning of each focus group, participants were informed that the research was for the Government of Canada/Health Canada. Participants were informed of the recording of their session in addition to the presence of Health Canada observers/listeners. Quorus ensured that prior consent was obtained at the recruitment stage and before participants entered the focus group room. Written participants’ consent was developed by Quorus and by Health Canada and was obtained from each in-person focus group participant prior to any recording. Furthermore, all participants 15 years of age were provided a parental/guardian consent form which needed to be completed and signed by one of their parents or guardians and produced at the facility prior to their participation in their focus group.

A total of 16 in-person focus groups were conducted across Canada with 103 youth and 36 educators, as per the table below:

Location	Segment	Language	Number of participants	Date and Time*
Regina, SK	Youth (13-15)	English	8	March 2 @ 5:30 pm
Regina, SK	Educators	English	9	March 2 @ 7:30 pm
Regina, SK	Youth regular vapers (16-19)	English	10	March 3 @ 5:30 pm

Location	Segment	Language	Number of participants	Date and Time*
Regina, SK	Youth occasional vapers (16-19)	English	9	March 3 @ 7:30 pm
Vancouver, BC	Youth (13-15)	English	10	March 4 @ 5:30 pm
Vancouver, BC	Educators	English	8	March 4 @ 7:30 pm
Vancouver, BC	Youth regular vapers (16-19)	English	7	March 5 @ 5:30 pm
Vancouver, BC	Youth occasional vapers (16-19)	English	9	March 5 @ 7:30 pm
Montreal, QC	Youth (13-15)	French	10	March 9 @ 5:30 pm
Montreal, QC	Educators	French	9	March 9 @ 7:30 pm
Montreal, QC	Youth regular vapers (16-19)	French	10	March 10 @ 5:30 pm
Montreal, QC	Youth occasional vapers (16-19)	French	9	March 10 @ 7:30 pm
Toronto, ON	Youth (13-15)	English	6	March 11 @ 5:30 pm
Toronto, ON	Educators	English	10	March 11 @ 7:30 pm
Toronto, ON	Youth regular vapers (16-19)	English	8	March 12 @ 5:30 pm
Toronto, ON	Youth occasional vapers (16-19)	English	7	March 12 @ 7:30 pm

*all times are local times

All focus groups were moderated by Rick Nadeau, one of Quorus' bilingual senior researchers on the Government of Canada Standing Offer.

Note regarding COVID-19:

Focus groups were also originally scheduled for St. John's, Newfoundland for March 13 and March 14. However, the increasing challenge and risk of convening individuals to a focus group in light of COVID-19 prompted the client and research team to postpone and eventually cancel this final set of focus groups.

Qualitative Research Disclaimer:

Qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. These results must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion because they are not statistically projectable.

Appendices

Youth Recruitment Screener

Health Canada – Youth Vaping Focus Group Project

Youth FG Screener

Specifications

- 20 focus groups will be conducted with young vapers and youth vapers and with educators in the following five locations:
 - Toronto
 - Montreal
 - St. John's
 - Regina
 - Vancouver
- Recruit 10 participants per group
- Young and youth participants to be paid \$100, while educators will receive \$150.
- 4 groups in each location will be held with the split based on participants' age and vaping frequency, one group with young vapers, two groups with youth vapers, and one with educators.
 - "Young vapers" is defined as anyone from age 13 to 15 years old and vapes regularly or occasionally.
 - "Youth regular vapers" is defined as anyone from 16 to 19 years old and vapes regularly.
 - "Youth occasional vapers" is defined as anyone from 16 to 19 years old and vapes occasionally.
 - "Educators/school staff" is defined as any teachers, administrators, guidance counsellors, or school staff that are in regular contact with youth from middle (grades 7-8) to high school (grades 9-12).
- All young and youth participants are regular (daily or almost daily) or occasional vapers.

Group 1 Regina March 2 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15)	Group 2 Regina March 2 7:30 pm Educators	Group 3 Regina March 3 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19)	Group 4 Regina March 3 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19)
Group 5 Vancouver March 4 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) Vancouver Focus – Fifth Floor 503-1080 Howe Street, V6Z 2T1	Group 6 Vancouver March 4 7:30 pm Educators Vancouver Focus – Fifth Floor 503-1080 Howe Street, V6Z 2T1	Group 7 Vancouver March 5 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) Vancouver Focus – 5th Floor 503-1080 Howe Street	Group 8 Vancouver March 5 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) Vancouver Focus – 5th Floor 503-1080 Howe Street
Group 9 Montreal March 9 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200	Group 10 Montreal March 9 7:30 pm Educators Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200	Group 11 Montreal March 10 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200	Group 12 Montreal March 10 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200
Group 13 Toronto March 11 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400	Group 14 Toronto March 11 7:30 pm Educators Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400	Group 15 Toronto March 12 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400	Group 16 Toronto March 12 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400
Group 17 St. John's March 13 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6	Group 18 St. John's March 13 7:30 pm Educators 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6	Group 19 St. John's March 14 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6	Group 20 St. John's March 14 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6

IMPORTANT: IF A HOUSEHOLD HAS MEMBERS WHO FALL INTO MORE THAN ONE OF “YOUNG”, OR “YOUTH” CATEGORIES, WE WANT TO AVOID RECRUITING TWO PEOPLE FROM THE SAME HOUSEHOLD – WE CAN RECRUIT ONE AS A BACKUP IF THEY WOULD BE IN SEPARATE GROUPS. IT IS DEFINITELY NOT ALLOWED IF THEY WOULD BE IN THE SAME FOCUS GROUP.

Questionnaire

A. Introduction

Hello/Bonjour, my name is [NAME] and I am with Quorus Consulting Group, a Canadian market research company. We’re planning a series of discussion groups on behalf of the Government of Canada, specifically Health Canada, with people in your area. Would you prefer to continue in English or French? / Préférez-vous continuer en anglais ou en français?

[INTERVIEWER NOTE: FOR ENGLISH GROUPS, IF PARTICIPANT WOULD PREFER TO CONTINUE IN FRENCH, PLEASE RESPOND WITH, "Malheureusement, nous recherchons des gens qui parlent anglais pour participer à ces groupes de discussion. Nous vous remercions de votre intérêt." FOR FRENCH GROUPS, IF PARTICIPANT WOULD PREFER TO CONTINUE IN ENGLISH, PLEASE RESPOND WITH, "Unfortunately, we are looking for people who speak French to participate in this discussion group. We thank you for your interest."]

[INTERVIEWER NOTE 2: IF SOMEONE IS ASKING TO PARTICIPATE IN FRENCH/ENGLISH BUT NO GROUP IN THIS LANGUAGE IS AVAILABLE IN THIS AREA, TALK TO YOUR SUPERVISOR.]

As I was saying – we are planning a series of discussion groups on behalf of the Government of Canada with people in your area. The groups will last up to two hours and people who take part will receive a cash gift to thank them for their time.

Participation is completely voluntary. We are interested in your opinions. No attempt will be made to sell you anything or change your point of view. The format is a "round table" discussion led by a research professional with up to ten participants. All opinions will remain anonymous and confidential and will be used for research purposes only in accordance with laws designed to protect your privacy.

[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED ABOUT PRIVACY LAWS, SAY: “The information collected through the research is subject to the provisions of the *Privacy Act*, legislation of the Government of Canada, and to the provisions of relevant provincial privacy legislation. For more information about our privacy practices, please contact Health Canada's Privacy Coordinator at 613-948-1219 or privacy-vie.privee@hc-sc.gc.ca.”]

1. Before we invite anyone to attend, we need to ask you a few questions to ensure that we get a good mix of people in each of the groups. This will take 5 minutes. May I continue?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	THANK/DISCONTINUE

B. Qualification

FOR YOUTH GROUPS – 13-17 YEARS OLD (VAPERS)

2. Are you the parent or guardian of a child who is 13 to 17 years old or is there someone else in the household who is? If so, may I speak with this person?

No	1	CONTINUE
Yes, self	2	GO TO YOUTH 13-19 SCREENER SECTION
Yes, someone else	3	ASK TO SPEAK TO THAT PERSON AND REPEAT INTRO

FOR YOUTH GROUPS – 18-19 YEARS OLD (VAPERS)

3. Is anyone in your household either 18 or 19 years old? If so, may I speak with this person?

No	1	THANK/DISCONTINUE
Yes, self	2	GO TO Q9 IN YOUTH 13-19 SCREENER SECTION
Yes, someone else	3	ASK TO SPEAK TO THIS PERSON AND REPEAT INTRO

C. SCREENER QUESTIONS

13-19 YEARS OLD VAPERS

ASK PARENTS OR GUARDIANS OF YOUTH 13-17 YEARS OLD:

We are conducting a research study for Health Canada that includes youth 13 to 19 years of age. The study is being conducted to help inform policy and regulatory decision making as well as gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon of vaping among youth. For this study, we're organizing discussion groups which are scheduled to run for 2 hours in the late afternoon and evening (during the day if Saturday). The discussion groups involve a small number of teens who will be asked to share their views on vaping and vaping behaviors. All opinions will remain anonymous and participation is voluntary. Those who take part will receive \$100 for their time and light refreshments will be served. The information collected will be used for research purposes only and handled according to the *Privacy Act* of Canada. The full name of your child will not be provided to the government or any other third party.

4. May we have your permission to ask your child some questions, including questions about his or her possible vaping behaviours, if any, to see if he or she qualifies for the discussion group which will take place on **[INSERT DATE]** at **[TIME]**?

Yes	1	
No	2	RETURN TO Q3
Yes but they are not available	3	RESCHEDULE

Thank you. Before I speak with your child, I have a few more questions for you.

5. Do you, or any member of your immediate family, work for ...? **[READ LIST]**

...a marketing research, public relations, or advertising firm?	1
...the media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc.)?	2
...the federal or provincial government?	3
...a tobacco or e-cigarette company?	4
...a smoking cessation company?	5
...a legal or law firm?	6
...a cannabis-related company?	7

IF YES TO ANY, THANK & TERMINATE

6. The discussion group will be video-recorded. These recordings are used to help analyze the findings and write the report. The results from the discussions will be grouped together in the research report, which means that individuals will not be identified in anyway. Neither your child's name nor his/her specific comments will appear in the research report. Is this acceptable?

Yes	1	
No	2	THANK & TERMINATE

7. There may be some people from Health Canada and other observers involved in this project observing the session in-person or remotely via a webcam set-up. They will not take part in the discussion and they will not know your child's name. Is this acceptable?

Yes	1	
No	2	THANK & TERMINATE

8. What is your child's first name? **RECORD:** _____

Thank you. Now I would like to speak to **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]** to make sure **[SHE/HE]** is interested and feels comfortable about taking part in a group discussion. Once I've done that, I would like to speak to you again.

ASK YOUTH 13-19 YEARS OLD

YOUTH 13-17 YEARS OLD: Hi **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]**, I'm **[RECRUITER]** of **[RESEARCH FIRM]**, a Canadian research company. Your mother/father/guardian gave me permission to talk to you about a research study.

We are conducting research with young people ages 13 to 19 for Health Canada, to help the department gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of vaping among youth. Please note that your responses to this call or your opinions during the focus group will not be shared with anyone, including your parents.

9. Please tell me how frequently did you use an e-cigarette (vape, vape pen, tank or mod) in the last 30 days?

Daily or almost daily	1	REGULAR USER
Less than daily, but at least once a week	2	REGULAR USER
Less than weekly, but at least once a month	3	OCCASIONAL USER
Less than monthly	4	OCCASIONAL USER
Not at all	5 ↓	

AGE 16+: THANK AND TERMINATE; AGES 13-15: SKIP TO Q11

10. For how long have you been using an e-cigarette or vaping?

Less than 1 year	1	} RECRUIT MIX AND SKIP TO Q13
1-2 years	2	
3-4 years	3	
4-5 years	4	
Over 5 years	5	

11. **[ASK ONLY TO 13-15 YEAR OLDS]** Have you ever tried vaping?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	THANK AND TERMINATE

12. **[ASK ONLY TO 13-15 YEAR OLDS]** Do you think you will ever use an e-cigarette or vaping product again, such as a vape, a vape pen, or a tank & mod? Would you say...**READ LIST**

Definitely yes	1	
Probably yes	2	
Probably not	3	
Definitely not	4	THANK AND TERMINATE

13. Do you/have you use(d) vaping products with cannabis only (without nicotine)?

Yes	1	THANK AND TERMINATE
No	2	
Don't know	3	

14. At the present time, do you smoke cigarettes (including cigarettes that are bought ready-made as well as cigarettes that you make yourself with only tobacco) every day, occasionally, or not at all?

Every day	1
Occasionally	2
Not at all	3
Prefer not say	9

I'd like to tell you a little bit more about the study to see if you might be interested in taking part. For this study, we're organizing discussion groups, each of which is scheduled to run for 2 hours in the late afternoon or evening (during the day if Saturday). The discussion groups involve a small number of teens who will be asked to share their views on vaping and vaping behaviors. All opinions will remain anonymous and participation is voluntary. Those who take part will receive a cash gift for their time and light refreshments will be served. The information collected will be used for research purposes only and handled according to the *Privacy Act* of Canada. The full names of participants will not be provided to the government or any other third party, other than the research firms.

[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED ABOUT PRIVACY LAWS, SAY: "The information collected through the research is subject to the provisions of the *Privacy Act*, legislation of the Government of Canada, and to the provisions of relevant provincial privacy legislation. For more information about our privacy practices, please contact Health Canada's Privacy Coordinator at 613-948-1219 or privacy-vie.privee@hc-sc.gc.ca."]

15. Would you be interested in taking part in this study?

Yes 1

No 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

16. Before we invite you to attend, I need to ask you a few questions to make sure we are getting a good mix of people for each discussion group. This will take 5 minutes. May I continue?

Yes 1

No 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

17. We are looking to include people of various ages in the group discussion. May I have your age please?

12 and less **THANK & TERMINATE**

13 years old 1

14 years old 2

15 years old 3

16 years old 4

17 years old 5

18 years old 6

19 years old 7

20 and more **THANK & TERMINATE**

Mix of ages

18. **ASK 18-19 YEARS OLD:** Do you, or any member of your immediate family, work for ...? **[READ LIST]**

...a marketing research, public relations, or advertising firm? 1

...the media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc.)? 2

...the federal or provincial government? 3

...a tobacco or e-cigarette company? 4

...a smoking cessation company? 5

...a legal or law firm? 6

...a cannabis-related company? 7

IF YES TO ANY, THANK & TERMINATE

D. DEMOGRAPHICS AND INDUSTRY QUESTIONS

ASK ADULTS 18+ ONLY:

19. Could you please tell me what is the last level of education that you have completed? **[READ LIST; GET MIX]**

- | | |
|--|---|
| Some high school | 1 |
| Completed high school | 2 |
| Some college/technical school/CEGEP | 3 |
| Graduated college/technical school/CEGEP | 4 |
| Some university | 5 |
| Graduated university | 6 |
| Graduate studies | 7 |

20. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible ethno-cultural group?

- | | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 2 |
- GO TO Q22**

21. What is your ethnic background? **RECORD**

RECORD ETHNICITY: _____

22. Have you ever attended a discussion group or taken part in an interview on any topic that was arranged in advance and for which you received money for participating?

- | | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 2 |
- GO TO Q26**

23. When did you last attend one of these discussion groups or interviews?

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Within the last 6 months | 1 | THANK & TERMINATE |
| Over 6 months ago | 2 | |

24. Thinking about the groups or interviews that you have taken part in, what were the main topics discussed?

RECORD: _____ **THANK/TERMINATE IF RELATED TO TOBACCO OR VAPING**

25. How many discussion groups or interviews have you attended in the past 5 years?

Fewer than 5 1

Five or more 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

26. Participants in group discussions are asked to voice their opinions and thoughts, how comfortable are you in voicing your opinions in a group discussion with others your age? Are you... **READ OPTIONS**

Very comfortable 1 **MIN 5 PER GROUP**

Fairly comfortable 2

Not very comfortable 3 **THANK & TERMINATE**

Very uncomfortable 4 **THANK & TERMINATE**

27. Sometimes participants are also asked to write out their answers on a questionnaire. Is there any reason why you could not participate? If you need glasses to read, please remember to bring them. (Add hearing impairment.)

Yes 1 **THANK & TERMINATE**

No 2

TERMINATE IF RESPONDENT OFFERS ANY REASON SUCH AS SIGHT OR HEARING PROBLEM, A WRITTEN OR VERBAL LANGUAGE PROBLEM, A CONCERN WITH NOT BEING ABLE TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY.

28. The discussion group will be video-recorded. These recordings are used to help with analyzing the findings and writing the report. The results from the discussions will be grouped together in the research report, which means that individuals will not be identified in anyway. Neither your name nor your specific comments will appear in the research report. Is this acceptable?

Yes 1

No 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

29. There may be some people from Health Canada and other observers involved in this project observing the session in-person or remotely via a webcam set-up. They will not take part in the discussion and they will not know your name. Is this acceptable?

Yes 1

No 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

E. INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

PARTICIPANTS 16+:

Thank you. We would like to invite you to attend one of the discussion groups, which will be led by a researcher from the national public opinion research firm, Quorus Consulting Group. The group will take place on **[DAY OF WEEK]**, **[DATE]**, at **[TIME]** and it will last two hours. Following your participation, you will receive \$100 to thank you for your time.

30. Are you interested and available to attend?

Yes 1

No 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

Do you have a pen handy so that I can give you the address where the group will be held? It will be held at **[INSERT FACILITY]**. I would like to remind you that the group is at **[TIME]** on **[DATE]**. We ask that you arrive 15 minutes early, at **[INSERT TIME]**. At the facility, you will be asked to produce photo identification, so please remember to bring something with you (for example, a driver's license or student card with photo). **[16 AND OLDER INCLUDE:** In order to participate, you will also be asked to read and sign a consent form when you arrive at the facility.]

Finally, if you use glasses to read, please bring them with you.

As we are only inviting a small number of people to attend, your participation is very important to us. If for some reason you are unable to attend, please call us so that we can get someone to replace you. You can reach us at **[INSERT NUMBER]** at our office. Please ask for **[INSERT NAME]**.

Someone from our company will call you the day before to remind you about the session. To do that, we need to have your contact information.

PARTICIPANT

First name:

Last Name:

Daytime phone number:

Evening phone number:

Email:

Thank you!

13-15 YEAR OLDS:

In the next few days, we will be sending your parent or legal guardian a letter by email. The letter will have instructions on what you need to do for the discussion group, as well as a consent form that your parent or guardian must sign and return to us in advance of the group. Now I need to talk to your parent/guardian again. Would you please put **[HER/HIM]** back on the phone?

Thank you for allowing me to speak with **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]**. **[SHE/HE]** would like to participate in the study. Here are a few other details about the group discussion:

- The discussion will last 2 hours, starting at: **[INSERT TIME]**.
- We ask that participants arrive 15 minutes early, that is by **[INSERT TIME]**.
- Following their participation, **[INSERT NAME OF CHILD]** will be given \$100.
- The discussion group will be held at: **[FACILITY NAME + ADDRESS]**

In the next few days, we would like to send you a letter by email. The letter will have instructions on what your child needs to do for the discussion group, as well as a consent form that you must sign and return to us in advance of the group. To send the letter, may we please have your contact information?

PARENT/GUARDIAN

First name:

Last Name:

Daytime phone number:

Evening phone number:

Email:

One last thing. Someone from our company will call the day before to remind you about your child's participation in the session.

Thank you!

Youth Moderation Guide

Youth Vaping Focus Group Project

A. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Introduce moderator/firm and welcome participants to the focus group.
 - Thanks for attending/value your being here.
 - Tonight/today, we're conducting research on behalf of Health Canada.
 - We will be seeking your opinion on various aspects of vaping.
 - The discussion will last approximately 2 hours.
 - If you have a cell phone or other electronic device, please turn it off.
- Describe focus group.
 - A discussion group is a "round table" discussion. We will also be asking you to do some exercises on paper to help guide the discussion.
 - My job is to facilitate the discussion, keeping us on topic and on time.
 - Your job is to offer your opinions on your experiences vaping.
 - There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a knowledge test.
 - Everyone's opinion is important and should be respected.
 - We want you to speak up even if you feel your opinion might be different from others. Your opinion may reflect that of other Canadians who are not in the room tonight/today.
- Explanations.
 - Comments treated in confidence.
 - Please note that anything you say during these groups will be held in the strictest confidence. We do not attribute comments to specific people. Our report summarizes the findings from the groups but does not mention anyone by name. Please do not provide any identifiable information about yourself.
 - The report can be accessed through the Library of Parliament or Archives Canada.
 - Your responses will in no way affect your dealings with the Government of Canada.
 - The session is being audio-video recorded. The recordings remain in our possession and will not be released to anyone, even to the Government of Canada, without your written consent.
 - Recording is for report writing purposes / verify feedback.

- Observers.
 - There are observers from Health Canada who will be watching behind the one-way mirror or online.
 - Purpose: oversee the research process and see your reactions first-hand.
- Any questions?
- Please note that the moderator is not an employee of the Government of Canada and may not be able to answer questions about what we will be discussing. If questions do come up over the course of the group, we will try to get answers for you before you leave.
- **Roundtable introduction:** What you all have in common, and part of the reason you are here, is that you all use or have used vaping products – and keep in mind that we are not referring to cannabis vaping in this discussion. But before we start I'd like you to tell us your first name, what grade you are in, and if you participate in any social group, school club, or extracurricular activity.

B. General Observations on Life as a Student (5 minutes)

So I haven't been a student or a teenager in a while – what's it like these days being a student? Is it easy or do you have your share of challenges? Help me understand this...

- What are some of the challenges or pressures you feel you need to deal with?

C. Initiation to Vaping (20 minutes)

[HANDOUT A] Ok, let's talk about how vaping started for you. I'm going to distribute a short exercise to you. I'd like you to write a short story that will tell the tale of how vaping came into your life and how, if at all, it has changed your life. This is not a school essay! A couple of sentences or paragraphs will do. Sentences or bullet points can also be used.

You don't have to refer to yourself directly in the story – you can tell your story through a character you invent, a name you invent, and it could be set in a world you invent. Write your story however way you like but we'd love to find out things like:

- Where did the main character try vaping for the first time?
- Who were they with?
- What was in the vape? ...was there nicotine? If so, how much?
- Where did they get the vape? Was it from a friend? ...someone else?
- What was going through their mind at the time?

- How were they feeling at the time?
- ...and finally, what has their life been like since?

What is important is that the story will help me understand what you went through. After you've written your story, try to give the story a title.

When you're done please put your story face down in the middle of the table.

WHEN ALL PARTICIPANTS FINISH, THE MODERATOR RANDOMLY REASSIGNS A STORY TO EACH PARTICIPANT TO READ [I.E. PARTICIPANTS DO NOT READ THEIR OWN STORY]. EVEN IF SOMEONE GETS THEIR OWN STORY BY CHANCE, THEY DON'T NEED TO TELL ANYONE IT IS THEIRS.

ALL STORIES ARE HEARD THEN DISCUSSED IN THE THIRD PERSON

- What do we think about the stories we've heard? As far as you can tell, are there any similarities between your stories?
- What are our main characters going through or thinking when they decide to try vaping?
 - I wonder if the main characters thought they were taking a risk? What do you think?
 - Do you think they were pressured into vaping?
- Why do you think our main characters decided to vape? **PROBE AS NEEDED:**
 - How important do you think it was that vaping just looked different from other things?
 - How important do you think it was that the vape was flavoured? Which flavour do you think got them interested?
 - How important was it to have nicotine in the vape? If there was nicotine did the main character know how much nicotine (concentration) was in it?
- If you had to guess, how much did the main characters know about vaping before they tried it for the first time?
- Based on what we've heard, how have the lives of all of our main characters changed since they've started vaping?

D. Current Vaping Patterns (15 minutes)

Now let's fast forward to today. Can one of you describe for me what a typical day looks like for you and where vaping fits into that day?

- Help me understand when, where and with whom you vape.
- How soon do you vape when you wake up in the morning?
- Are you vaping different things each time or is it almost always the same thing? Walk me through this...
- If you are not alone, are you all vaping the same product or are different ones being vaped?
- How long is a typical "vape break"?

- I noticed some of you vape at school...
 - Where exactly do you vape at school?
 - Are devices passed around or do you each have your own device?
 - How does your school control vaping? How do you get around it?

- Since you've started vaping, have you introduced it to any of your friends? ...have you encouraged any friends to try vaping? How did that go?
 - Does everyone in your immediate circle of friends vape?

E. Attitudes about Vaping (15 minutes)

- **[DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT B]** I will pass around a short, written exercise about your vaping. Please complete the sheet as an individual exercise and then we'll discuss.
 - **DISCUSS BOX 1** – Help me understand "the best thing about vaping."
 - **DISCUSS BOX 2** – How does vaping make you feel?

- If I asked you to rate how important vaping is for you personally, please tell me a number on a scale from 0 to 10 where you stand, assuming 0 means "not at all important", and "extremely important".

- How would you finish the following sentence: In my life, vaping is about as important as....
- If you were to find out tomorrow that you could no longer vape, how would that make you feel? What would you do?

F. Perceptions of Risk (15 minutes)

I'd like to get your opinion of how "risky" you feel vaping is.

[HANDOUT C] I will ask you to now rate the following products/activities on a scale from 0 to 10 in terms of the level of risk they might have to you personally. Use a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means zero risk and 10 means "extremely risky".

- As far as you know, are there any risks to vaping?
 - Do you know if there is a health risk when using vaping products?
 - Are there other consequences of vaping other than the health risk?
 - Have you always thought this way?
 - What or who do you think has influenced your opinion on the risk you take?
- What did you write down as "the worst thing about vaping"?
- Is there a difference between vaping and smoking cigarettes?

G. Product Preferences (25 minutes)

Let's talk a bit about the devices and products you currently use. I want to begin with the vape itself. If you happen to have one with you feel free to put it on the table to describe it to us.

SHOW OF HANDS How many of you here own your own device?

ASK DEVICE OWNERS:

- How did you get your device? **PROBE:** Online, friend, known store, known guy.
- Would you say it was easy or difficult to get your own device?
- Was it in its original packaging when you got it? Do you keep it in the original packaging?

- When you first started, were you sharing with someone else first?
 - **IF YES:**
 - How long were you sharing before you got your own?
 - Why was it important to you to get your own? / What made you buy your own device?
- How did you choose the device you currently use? Did you have a choice? What mattered in your decision to choose one type of device or brand over another?
- Have you ever recommended a device to someone else? What advice did you give?

ASK THOSE WHO DO NOT OWN THEIR OWN DEVICE:

- So for the rest of you, since you don't own your own device, I guess someone shares their device with you when you vape - do you know how many people share the same device?
- Have you thought of owning your own device? Why would that be important for you?
- What would you look for in the device you end up getting?
- If you wanted to get your own device tomorrow, how would you go about doing that? ...would it be easy or difficult?

Now let's discuss the products you vape.

- Can you separate taste and smell from the vaping products you use?
- Honestly, show of hands – for how many here does the fact that there are flavours really matter to you in your decision to vape? ...how much do they matter?
 - What is your favourite flavour?
 - Do you remember the first flavour that ever got you interested in vaping?
 - What if tomorrow you were to find out that all the different flavours were no longer available, what would you do?
- For those of you using a pod-based device, honestly, do you know if you are using real pods or not? How do you know they are not counterfeit?
 - Does it even matter to you?
 - When you get your pods, do you see the packaging they come in?

Now, let's talk about nicotine in vaping products.

- Do you vape products with or without nicotine?
 - What difference does it make?
 - Are there times you use products with nicotine and other times you don't?
 - Are there times when you change the level of nicotine? Help me understand this...
- Are you aware of the nicotine levels in the vaping products you use?
- What do you consider a "high level" of nicotine vs. a "low level"? ...at what level of nicotine do you typically vape?
- Is there a specific circumstance when you use a "high level" of nicotine? What is it?
PROBE: Is the nicotine hit important? Why?
- Do you consider yourself addicted to nicotine? Why do you say that?
- Have any of you heard of nicotine salts? What do you think of this type of product?

Where are you seeing or hearing about all the different vaping products out there? How do you find out about what's out there / what the options are?

And do you know any specific brands of vaping products available on the market these days? Which ones do you know? Have any of the others in the room heard of that brand? **SHOW OF HANDS EACH TIME A BRAND IS MENTIONED**

H. Gateway and Multiuse (5 minutes)

- Let's move on to other substances used in vapes than what we have discussed so far (mainly nicotine and flavours).
- What other substances do you use when you vape? **PROBE:** Smoking tobacco, cannabis, drinking alcohol, other recreational drugs
 - When do you tend to do this?
- How many of you smoke **cigarettes** or have smoked cigarettes?
- Have any of you stopped smoking cigarettes since you've started vaping?

- Do any of you vape and also smoke? For those of you who do both, would you say that you typically smoke more than you vape, less than you vape or do you smoke and vape about the same? Has this changed?
- Have any of you started smoking cigarettes since you've started vaping? Do you think that this had anything to do with the fact that you were already vaping or do you think it would have happened anyways?
- Have any of you started smoking **cannabis** (not vaping it) since you've started vaping? Do you think that this had anything to do with the fact that you were already vaping or do you think it would have happened anyways?
- **For occasional vapers:** Do you think you will increase the number of times you vape in the future? What makes you think that way? What have you seen among those around you who vape – are they vaping more than before?

I. Cessation (5 minutes)

- What did you write down in the earlier exercise about...
 - "Vaping in my future looks like..."
- What did you write down in the earlier exercise about...
 - "I haven't quit vaping because..."
- Do you envision a time when you think you will stop vaping? When would that be and why?
- Do you think it would be easy or difficult to stop vaping? Why?
- For those who have quit smoking, do you think it would be easier, harder, or the same as quitting smoking? Help me understand why.

J. Discussions About Vaping (5 minutes)

- Have you had any conversations with anyone about vaping?
 - With whom did you have a conversation? How did that conversation go? What did they say and what did you say?
 - Among all the information you may have seen, read or heard about vaping, has anything stuck with you at all? Was there anything you heard that made you think a bit about the potential risks associated with vaping?
 - What was the message? Who said it or where did you see it?
 - Why did that matter to you?
- If you wanted to get information you could trust about the health effects of vaping, where would you go or who would you ask?
 - **IF NOT MENTIONED:** Would you even think of going to Health Canada? Would you believe information coming from Health Canada?

K. Conclusion (2 minutes)

- We've covered a lot today/tonight and I really appreciate you taking the time to come and share your opinions. I'm going to leave the room now to check with the observers to see if there are any last questions for you. When I come back, I'm going to ask whether any of you have any last suggestions or thoughts that you want to share with the Government of Canada about what we discussed tonight/today.

MODERATOR WILL LEAVE THE ROOM AND CHECK WITH OBSERVERS TO SEE IF THERE ARE LAST QUESTIONS.

- Does anyone have any last thoughts or feedback to share with the Government of Canada about the topic? Thank you very much for your time. This concludes the discussion group.

Youth Handout 1

Title: _____

Write a short story that will tell the tale of how vaping came into your life and how, if at all, it has changed your life. This is not a school essay! A couple of paragraphs will do.

You don't have to refer to yourself directly in the story – you can tell your story through a character you invent, a name you invent, and it could be set in a world you invent. Write your story however way you like but we'd love to find out things like

- Where did the main character try vaping for the first time?
- Who were they with?
- What was in the vape? ...was there nicotine? If so, how much?
- Where did they get the vape? Was it from a friend? ...someone else?
- What was going through their mind at the time?
- How were they feeling at the time?
- ...and finally, what has their life been like since?

Once upon a time...

[illegible]

THE END.

Youth Handout 2

Please read and complete the sentence. Just write down the first thing that comes to mind—it can be a single word or a phrase.

The best thing about vaping is....

Vaping makes me feel...

Vaping in my future looks like...

The worst thing about vaping is...

I haven't quit vaping because...

Youth Handout 3

Please rate how harmful you think each of the following would be to your health using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means “not at all harmful to my health” and 10 means “extremely harmful to my health.”

	RATING
Vaping with nicotine	
Vaping without nicotine	
Smoking cigarettes	
Drinking alcohol	
Overeating	
Undereating	
Using a smartphone while driving	
Sharing personal information on social media	
Online shopping	
Gambling	
Using cannabis	
Using hard drugs	
Using prescribed drugs that were not prescribed to you	

Educator Recruitment Screener

Health Canada – Youth Vaping Focus Group Project Educators FG Screener

Specifications

- 20 focus groups will be conducted with young vapers and youth vapers and with educators or school staff with regular contact with youth in the following five locations:
 - Toronto
 - Montreal
 - St. John's
 - Regina
 - Vancouver
- Recruit 10 participants per group
- Young and youth participants to be paid \$100, while educators would receive \$150.
- 4 groups in each location will be held with the split based on participants' age and vaping frequency, one group with young vapers, two groups with youth vapers, and one with educators/school staff.
 - "Young vapers" is defined as anyone from age 13 to 15 years old and vapes regularly or occasionally.
 - "Youth regular vapers" is defined as anyone from 16 to 19 years old and vapes regularly.
 - "Youth occasional vapers" is defined as anyone from 16 to 19 years old and vapes occasionally.
 - "Educators/school staff" is defined as any teachers, administrators, guidance counsellors, or school staff that are in regular contact with youth from middle (grades 7-8) to high school (grades 9-12).
- All young and youth participants are regular (daily or almost daily) or occasional vapers.

Group 1 Regina March 2 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15)	Group 2 Regina March 2 7:30 pm Educators	Group 3 Regina March 3 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19)	Group 4 Regina March 3 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19)
Group 5 Vancouver March 4 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) Vancouver Focus – Fifth Floor 503-1080 Howe Street, V6Z 2T1	Group 6 Vancouver March 4 7:30 pm Educators Vancouver Focus – Fifth Floor 503-1080 Howe Street, V6Z 2T1	Group 7 Vancouver March 5 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) Vancouver Focus – 5th Floor 503-1080 Howe Street	Group 8 Vancouver March 5 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) Vancouver Focus – 5th Floor 503-1080 Howe Street
Group 9 Montreal March 9 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200	Group 10 Montreal March 9 7:30 pm Educators Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200	Group 11 Montreal March 10 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200	Group 12 Montreal March 10 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) Ad Hoc Research – 400 Boulevard de Maisonneuve O #1200
Group 13 Toronto March 11 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400	Group 14 Toronto March 11 7:30 pm Educators Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400	Group 15 Toronto March 12 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400	Group 16 Toronto March 12 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) Decision Point Research – 164 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 400
Group 17 St. John's March 13 5:30 pm Young vapers (13-15) 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6	Group 18 St. John's March 13 7:30 pm Educators 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6	Group 19 St. John's March 14 5:30 pm Youth regular vapers (16-19) 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6	Group 20 St. John's March 14 7:30 pm Youth occasional vapers (16-19) 55 Duckworth Street, St, John's NL, A16 1E6

Hello, may I speak to _____?

My name is _____. I'm calling from Quorus Consulting on behalf of the Government of Canada, specifically Health Canada. We are planning a series of discussion groups with educators in your area and Health Canada is interested in your input and opinions.

The Government of Canada is now in the process of exploring perceptions of youth vaping and would like to obtain feedback from educators like yourself in your region. A better understanding of the experience of vaping in a school setting can assist in understanding the information needs of students.

If you agree to participate, you will join other educators and school staff in a group discussion moderated by a professional researcher. The groups will last up to two hours and will be conducted in the evening (during the day, if Saturday). People who take part will receive a cash gift to thank them for their time and light refreshments will be served. The format is a "round table" discussion led by a facilitator with up to 10 participants.

All opinions will remain anonymous and confidential, and participation is voluntary. The information collected will be used for research purposes only and handled according to the *Privacy Act* of Canada. The full names of participants will not be provided to the government or any other organizations other than the research firms involved.

[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF ASKED ABOUT PRIVACY LAWS, SAY: "The information collected through the research is subject to the provisions of the *Privacy Act*, legislation of the Government of Canada, and to the provisions of relevant provincial privacy legislation. For more information about our privacy practices, please contact Health Canada's Privacy Coordinator at 613-948-1219 or privacy-vie.privee@hc-sc.gc.ca."]

1. Would you be interested in taking part in this study?

Yes	1	
No	2	THANK & TERMINATE

2. Before we invite you to attend, I need to ask you a few questions to make sure we are getting a good mix of people for each session. This will take 5 minutes. May I continue?

Yes	1	
No	2	THANK & TERMINATE

3. Record gender by observation.

Female	1	}	Mix of genders, if possible
Male	2		

RECRUITER NOTE: WHEN TERMINATING AN INTERVIEW, SAY: “Thank you very much for your cooperation. We are unable to invite you to participate because we have enough participants who have a similar profile to yours.”

4. Do you, or any member of your immediate family, work for...? **[READ LIST]**

...a marketing research, public relations, or advertising firm?	1
...the media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc.)?	2
...the federal or provincial government?	3
...a tobacco or e-cigarette company?	4
...a smoking cessation company?	5
...a legal or law firm?	6
...a cannabis-related company?	7

IF YES TO ANY, THANK & TERMINATE

5. Can you please confirm that you are currently an educator or school staff who are in regular contact with youth in your school?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	THANK & TERMINATE

6. What is the name of your school? _____

ENSURE THAT NO MORE THAN TWO PARTICIPANTS ARE FROM THE SAME SCHOOL

7. What is your current role at your school?

Teacher	1	CONTINUE
Administrator (principal, vice-principal)	2	CONTINUE
Student services (guidance counsellor, community animator, special ed. technician, drug awareness, nurse, psychologist, social worker, etc.)	3	CONTINUE
Other (admin support, reception, secretary, finance)	4	THANK & DISCONTINUE

8. Which grades are you working with as an educator or school staff this year? **ACCEPT MORE THAN ONE OPTION IF NEEDED**

Grade 6 or lower	1	}	SKIP TO Q10
Grade 7	2		
Grade 8	3		
Grade 9 to 12	4		

ASK IF CURRENTLY TEACHES OR IS IN CONTACT WITH YOUTH IN GRADE 6 OR LOWER

9. Which grades did you work with in the 2018 to 2019 school year? **ACCEPT MORE THAN ONE OPTION IF NEEDED**

Grade 6 or lower	1	THANK & DISCONTINUE IF ONLY THIS
Grade 7	2	
Grade 8	3	
Grade 9 to 12	4	

10. For how many years have you been an educator or school staff in regular contact with youth in a school? _____ years

Less than a year	1	}	THANK & DISCONTINUE Mix of years of experience, if possible
1 to 9 years	2		
At least 10 years	3		

11. Have you ever attended a discussion group or taken part in interview on any topic that was arranged in advance and for which you received money for participating?

Yes	1	GO TO Q15
No	2	

12. When did you last attend one of these discussion groups or interviews?

Within the last 6 months	1	THANK & TERMINATE
Over 6 months ago	2	

13. Thinking about the groups or interviews that you have taken part in, what were the main topics discussed?

RECORD: _____ **THANK/TERMINATE IF RELATED TO TOBACCO OR VAPING**

14. How many discussion groups or interviews have you attended in the past 5 years?

Fewer than 5 1

Five or more 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

15. Participants in group discussions are asked to voice their opinions and thoughts, how comfortable are you in voicing your opinions in a group discussion with others your age? Are you... **READ OPTIONS**

Very comfortable 1 **MIN 5 PER GROUP**

Fairly comfortable 2

Not very comfortable 3 **THANK & TERMINATE**

Very uncomfortable 4 **THANK & TERMINATE**

16. Sometimes participants are also asked to write out their answers on a questionnaire. Is there any reason why you could not participate? If you need glasses to read or a hearing aid, please remember to bring them.

Yes 1 **THANK & TERMINATE**

No 2

TERMINATE IF RESPONDENT OFFERS ANY REASON SUCH AS SIGHT OR HEARING PROBLEM, A WRITTEN OR VERBAL LANGUAGE PROBLEM, A CONCERN WITH NOT BEING ABLE TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY OR IF YOU HAVE A CONCERN.

17. The discussion group will be video-recorded. These recordings are used to help analyze the findings and write the report. The results from the discussions will be grouped together in the research report, which means that individuals will not be identified in anyway. Neither your name nor specific comments will appear in the research report. Is this acceptable?

Yes 1

No 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

18. There may be some people from Health Canada and other observers involved in this project observing the session in-person or remotely via a webcam set-up. They will not take part in the discussion and they will not know your name. Is this acceptable?

Yes 1

No 2 **THANK & TERMINATE**

19. If you are interested, we would like to invite you to our focus group. The session is currently being scheduled for the evening of March xx @ 7:30 pm. The session lasts about two hours. Following your participation, you will receive \$150 to thank you for your time. Will you still be able to participate?

Yes	1	
No	2	THANK & TERMINATE

Thank you.

IF APPLICABLE:

May I please get your first name: _____

Do you have a pen handy so that I can give you the address where the group will be held? The group will be held at **[INSERT FACILITY]**. We ask that you arrive 15 minutes early, at **[INSERT TIME]**. At the facility, you will be asked to produce photo identification, so please remember to bring an ID with you (for example, a driver's license, health card with photo). For your information, in order to participate, you will also be asked to read and sign a video consent form when you arrive at the facility.

As we are only inviting a small number of people to attend, your participation is very important to us. If for some reason you are unable to attend, please call us so that we can get someone to replace you. You can reach us at **[INSERT NUMBER]** at our office. Please ask for **[INSERT NAME]**.

Someone from our company will call you the day before or send you an email to remind you about the session.

20. Could you confirm this is the best contact information where we can reach you:

Name: _____
Email: _____
Telephone number: _____

IF NO, OBTAIN CORRECT INFORMATION.

We'll be sending you an email with the logistics of the focus group.

Thank you very much, we'll be in touch soon!

Educator Introduction Letter

Le message en français suivra.

Good day,

The Government of Canada (Health Canada) is in the process of exploring perceptions of youth vaping. A better understanding of the experience of vaping in a school setting will help Health Canada in understanding the information needs of students and those who interact with them regularly.

For this purpose, Health Canada would like to obtain feedback from educators and school staff in your region. They have asked Quorus Consulting Group, an Ottawa-based market research company, to conduct focus groups with educators and school staff that are in regular contact with youth.

We would like to extend the invitation to educators and school staff who are in regular contact with youth in your school to participate in one of the sessions taking place the evening of **[DATE]** in downtown **[CITY]** at 7:30 pm. Participants may include teachers, administrators (i.e. principal, vice-principal), student services staff (i.e. guidance counsellor, special education technician, drug awareness staff, nurse, psychologist, social workers). Participants will join up to 10 other educators and school staff in a group discussion moderated by a professional researcher. For their time, they will receive a monetary honorarium.

We ask that you kindly forward this invitation to educators and staff in regular contact with youth in grades 7 through 12 in your school. Those interested in participating should **send a request to Eva Gastelum, Research Manager at Quorus, at eva@quorusconsulting.com** so that we can schedule a quick call with them to discuss the logistics of the focus group and to obtain a few pieces of information from them (to make sure we are getting a good mix of participants in each session). Please note that depending on the level of interest, not everyone will be able to participate.

IMPORTANT: Only those who register with Quorus will be able to attend a focus group - to participate, please contact Eva Gastelum at the email address noted above. If, however you have any questions regarding this study you can reach Health Canada directly by contacting Megan Tam, Acting Manager, Research Integration, Tobacco Control Directorate, by email at megan.tam@canada.ca.

Sincerely,

Rick Nadeau, President

Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

www.quorusconsulting.com

Educator Moderation Guide

Exploratory Research on Youth Vaping – Winter 2020

A. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Introduce moderator/firm and welcome participants to the focus group.
 - Thanks for attending/value your being here.
 - Tonight/today, we're conducting research on behalf of Health Canada.
 - We will be seeking your opinion on vaping among youth.
 - The discussion will last approximately 2 hours.
 - If you have a cell phone or other electronic device, please turn it off.
- Describe focus group.
 - A discussion group is a "round table" discussion.
 - My job is to facilitate the discussion, keeping us on topic and on time.
 - Your job is to share your opinions and observations on youth vaping in your school.
 - There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a knowledge test.
 - Everyone's opinion is important and should be respected.
 - We want you to speak up even if you feel your opinion might be different from others. Your opinion may reflect that of other Canadians who are not in the room tonight/today.
- Explanations.
 - Comments treated in confidence.
 - Please note that anything you say during these groups will be held in the strictest confidence. We do not attribute comments to specific people. Our report summarizes the findings from the groups but does not mention anyone by name. Please do not provide any identifiable information about yourself.
 - The report can be accessed through the Library of Parliament or Archives Canada.

- Your responses will in no way affect your dealings with the Government of Canada.
- The session is being audio-video recorded. The recordings remain in our possession and will not be released to anyone, even to the Government of Canada, without your written consent.
 - Recording is for report writing purposes / verify feedback.
- Observers.
 - There are observers from Health Canada who will be watching behind the one-way mirror or online.
 - Purpose: oversee the research process and see your reactions first-hand.
- Any questions?
- Please note that the moderator is not an employee of the Government of Canada and may not be able to answer questions about what we will be discussing. If questions do come up over the course of the group, we will try to get answers for you before you leave.
- **Roundtable introduction:** What you all have in common, and part of the reason you are here, is that you all teach or interact with students in a school setting. Please tell us your first name, how many years you've been working in education and what your role is/what grade(s) you teach.

B. General Observations on School Life (10 minutes)

We are going to start our discussion tonight with how things are right now for students in your school. How, if at all, is student life different today compared to 5 - 10 years ago? This could be anything.

What are the biggest issues facing your school today? How big of a problem is it?

- Are students facing the same pressures that they used to or anything different?
- Have you noticed any changes in how parents are parenting that may be affecting students?
- Has the environment changed in schools at all? **IF YES:** what impact does this have on students?
 - **PROBE IF THEY CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING:** Are they facing any new challenges? Is it harder for students to fit in?

C. Attitudes about Vaping (25 minutes)

Let's direct our attention now to vaping. We're going to go back in time a bit here. Thinking back to the very first time you heard about vaping or perhaps saw it for yourself without knowing what it was. Tell me a bit about that.

MODERATOR NOTE: If cannabis is raised, re-direct once the point is made that we want to focus on vaping with products that contain nicotine or are flavoured.

- And what were your impressions of it at the time?

Have these perceptions changed over time? What are your impressions of vaping today?

- Is there anything in particular that changed your views on vaping? **PROBE IF NEEDED:** Such as a news article? Something someone said to you? Something on TV? Anything else?
- How knowledgeable do you feel about it?
- What have you seen or heard about vaping?
- How often do you talk about vaping amongst colleagues?

Do you have different perceptions of vaping with nicotine compared to vaping without?

FLIP CHART: Let's now explore what youth think of vaping. I'm going to go around the room and each of you are going to tell me in one or two words, the reasons you think youth start to vape. You'll have a chance to explain your answer afterwards.

Let's discuss, why did you say this?

- **PROBE:** Do you believe the reasons youth start to vape today are different than they were a few years ago? If so, in what way?

FLIP CHART: Now I'd like to go around the room and have each of you tell me in one or two words, the reasons you think youth vape. You'll have a chance to explain your answer afterwards.

Let's discuss, why did you say this?

- **PROBE:** Do you believe the reasons youth vape today are different than they were a few years ago? If so, in what way?

Have you ever had a discussion with one or many students to understand their views on vaping?
If so, what did you learn from those conversations?

Have any of them ever explained to you why they are interested in vaping or why they started vaping in the first place? If so, what did you learn from those conversations?

D. Incidence of Vaping and Measures Taken at School (25 minutes)

Thinking about your students now. Raise your hand if you've ever seen or heard of one of your students vaping. **RECORD NUMBER**

How big of an issue do you think vaping is in your school? Is there a difference with vaping (e-liquids) versus other substance use such as smoking tobacco, cannabis or alcohol?

Do you think vaping is more prevalent among some groups of students compared to others?

- What kind of student?
- Has this changed at all over time?
- Are these students different from those who are smoking, drinking or using cannabis? If so, In what ways?

Have you noticed any differences in terms of what devices kids are using today compared with the past?

If you had to take a guess, what proportion of your students vape? Write it down on the sheet in front of you. **MODERATOR QUICKLY COLLECTS PERCENTAGES**

- Do you think this percentage has changed at all over time?
 - **IF YES:** In what way, and why do you think the situation has changed?

Picture this - you're walking down the hall and you see a student who is vaping or holding a vape and possibly about to start. What happens next?

- How do you deal with that? What do you say to them?
 - Do you have a policy in place at the school? Is it different for other substance use or other behaviours such as cell phone use?
 - Did your school develop its own policy or was it provided by the Board?
- What actions are taken with the student?
- Has this procedure changed over time?

How many times in a week would you be dealing with this issue? **PROBE IF CAN'T COME UP WITH ANYTHING:** how many times in a month?

- Has this changed over time? Increased or decreased?
- Does it tend to be the same students?

Now how do the students react when they are caught vaping?

- Is this different than with other substances or issues in schools?

IF NOT ALREADY SAID: Do you ever confiscate the devices, pods or anything else vaping related?

- **IF YES:** are they ever returned to the students? Tell me about this process.
- **IF NO:** Why not? Is there another tactic you use instead?

Would students ever disclose where they got their products?

- If so, is there a “known student” who is supplying these products? In other words, what is the typical student who would be supplying these products?

E. Vaping vs. Other Substances (15 minutes)

Substances like tobacco, alcohol and cannabis have been prevalent in schools for a very long time. In your opinion, do students behave differently with vaping than they do with other behaviours like smoking and drinking?

- **PROBE IF NEEDED:**
 - Are students more open to talking about it?
 - Are they more likely to vape in the schools?
 - Are they less likely to smoke at school?
 - Are they more likely to smoke at school?

How do you think students perceive vaping?

- Do they think it is relatively harmless in comparison to other substances?

F. Information Sources and Needs (25 minutes)

When you deal with a student vaping, what messages, if any, do you communicate to the student?

- **PROBE:** Do you feel well equipped to deal with vaping? Why/why not?
- Do you communicate with parents about vaping? Do parents raise the subject with you/the school? What messages are shared?
- Has your school organized any activities specifically to talk about vaping? What kind of activities?

Are there any resources available to you to deal with vaping? **IF YES**, what are they?

- Do you use these resources to talk to students in a group setting or individual setting?
- In what type of situation would you use these resources?
- Where do you get these resources? Who developed them? Did you seek out this information and resources on your own or were they provided to you at school?
 - **PROBE:** Are you receiving information from **local public health units**? What are you receiving and were any of them particularly helpful? Why?
 - **PROBE:** What about from **the province**? What are you receiving and were any of them particularly helpful? Why?
- Is there anything in particular that you really like about the approach taken with any of these resources, whether it be the type of information provided, the format used, etc.?

Now, you each have a piece of paper in front of you. I want you to take a few minutes and write down any questions you have about vaping. As few or as many as you like, but try and think of at least one.

- Now we'll go around the room and have each of you say one or two of the questions you wrote down. **PARTICIPANTS TO KEEP THEIR PAPERS TO COLLECT AT THE END**

In a perfect world, where would you like to get this information from?

- Via what method would you like to receive this information?

Are you aware of or maybe even used any resources prepared by **Health Canada**? **MODERATOR SHOWS SOME EXAMPLES**

MODERATOR NOTE: School kits were distributed to almost all middle and high schools (except Quebec) in October 2019. These included posters, mirror-clings, parent tip sheets, and a “how to talk to teens” about vaping sheets.

IF “EXPERIENTIAL EVENTS” ARE RAISED: these were in-person events hosted at school as part of our broader public education campaign. They included quizzes and a maze.

- What do you think of these resources? Did you find them useful? Which ones and why?
- Do you recall seeing these resources? Did you use them?
- Did you order more? Why or why not? Who takes care of that?
- Was anything missing from these? Any suggestions for improving them?
- Did you hear anything from students about these resources or the experiential event (if it was at their school)? What did they say?

In order to best deal with this issue with your students, what information source or resources would work best with your students? What would engage them?

- Based on your experience, is there a type of message that strongly resonates with students?

G. Conclusion (5 minutes)

We’ve covered a lot today/tonight and I really appreciate you taking the time to come and share your opinions. I’m going to leave the room now to check with the observers to see if there are any last questions for you. When I come back, I’m going to ask whether any of you have any last suggestions or thoughts that you want to share with the Government of Canada about what we discussed tonight/today.

MODERATOR WILL LEAVE THE ROOM AND CHECK WITH OBSERVERS TO SEE IF THERE ARE LAST QUESTIONS.

Does anyone have any last thoughts or feedback to share with the Government of Canada about the topic? Thank you very much for your time. This concludes the discussion group.