

34 - Use of electronic cigarettes among children in Great Britain

Key Findings

- Although children's awareness of and experimentation with electronic cigarettes is increasing, regular use remains rare and is most common among those who currently smoke or have previously smoked. This indicates that it is unlikely that electronic cigarettes are currently acting as a gateway to smoking.
- A growing proportion of young people believe that electronic cigarettes are as harmful as smoking tobacco.
- Rechargeable tanks and fruit flavours are the most popular types of e-cigarettes among young people both for experimentation and regular use.

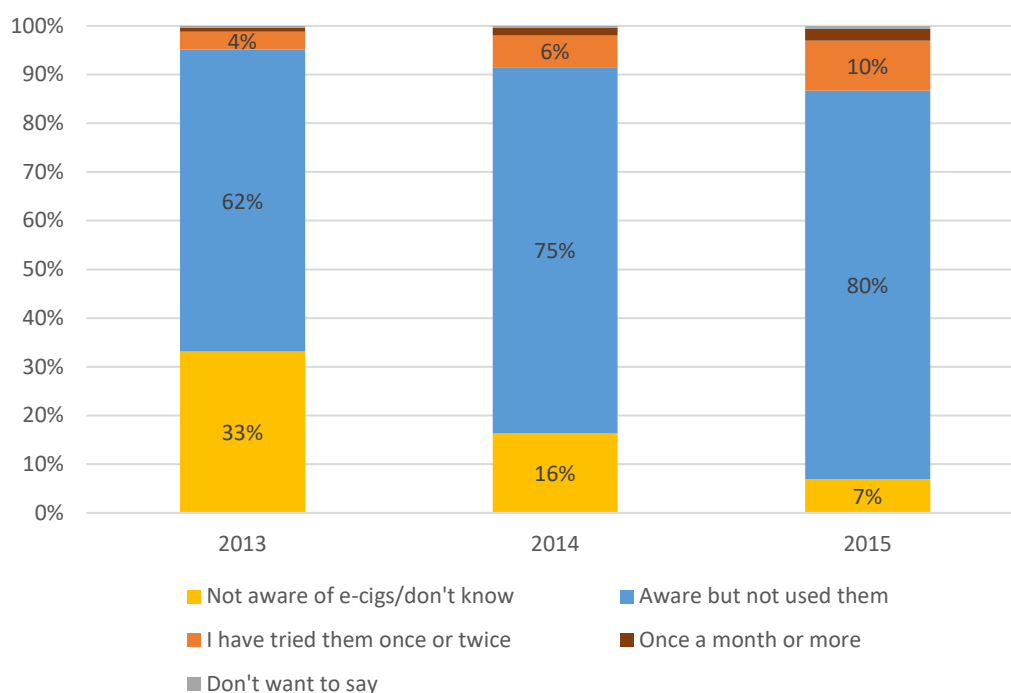
Electronic cigarette use among young people in Great Britain

From 2013 onwards YouGov has been commissioned by ASH to conduct an annual online survey of young people aged between 11 and 18, called Smokefree GB Youth Survey. It includes questions on electronic cigarettes. The most recent Smokefree GB Youth Survey was carried out in March 2015¹ and relevant comparisons with previous years^{2,3} are presented here.

In 2015 only 7% of 11-18 year olds said they had not heard of electronic cigarettes, down from 33% in 2013. 13% of those surveyed had tried e-cigarettes at least once, this is up from 5% in 2013. In 2015 more young people (21%) had tried cigarettes than electronic cigarettes and 64% of those using e-cigarettes had tried tobacco first.

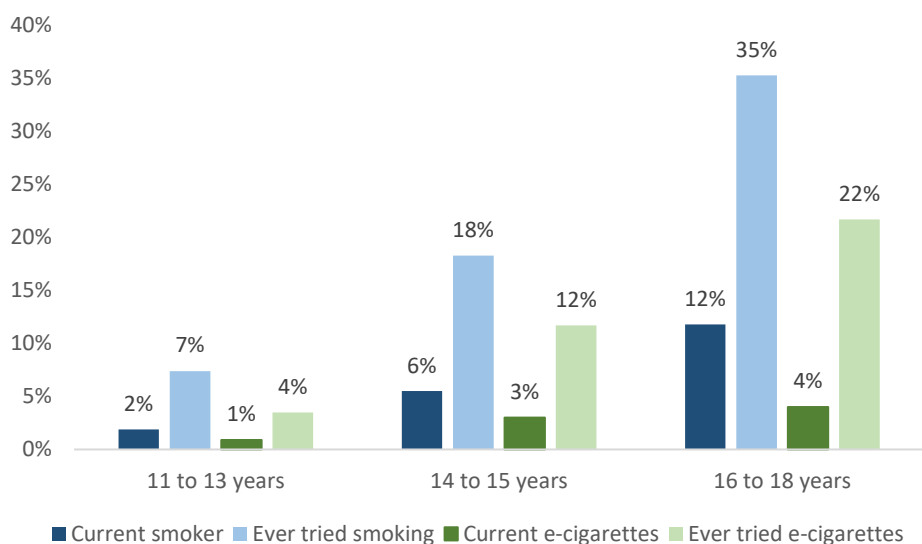
Regular use (once a month or more) was rare and largely among children who currently or have previously smoked. 2.4% of respondents said they used electronic cigarettes once a month or more, including 0.5% who used them weekly.

Use and awareness of electronic cigarettes between 2013 and 2015



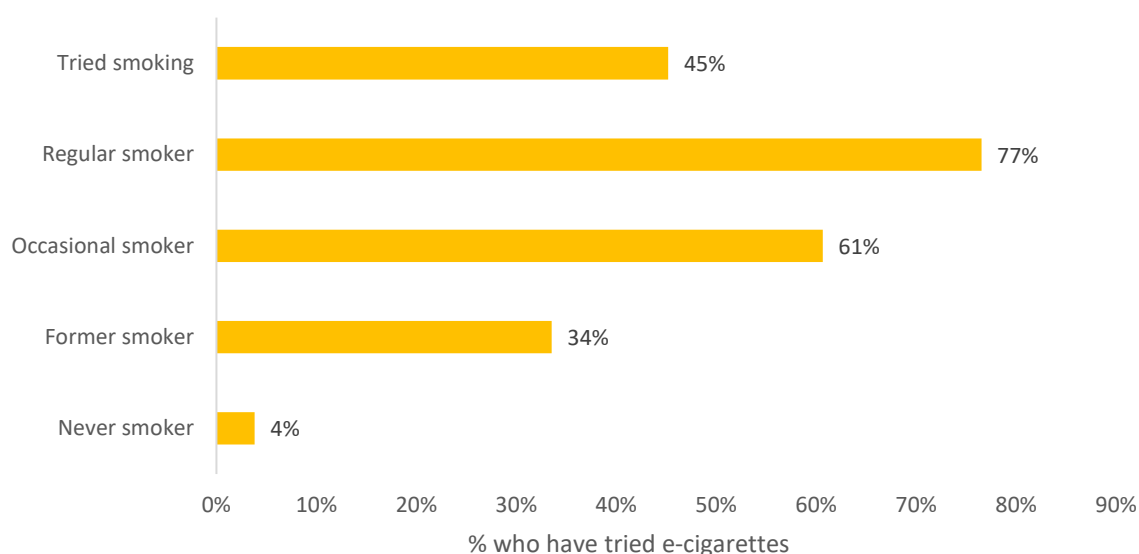
Unweighted base: All 11-18 year olds (2013 = 2,178, 2014 = 2,068, 2015 = 2,291)

Levels of smoking cigarettes and electronic cigarettes in those aged 11-18. ASH Smokefree GB Youth survey, 2015



Base: All 11-18 year olds (n=2,291)

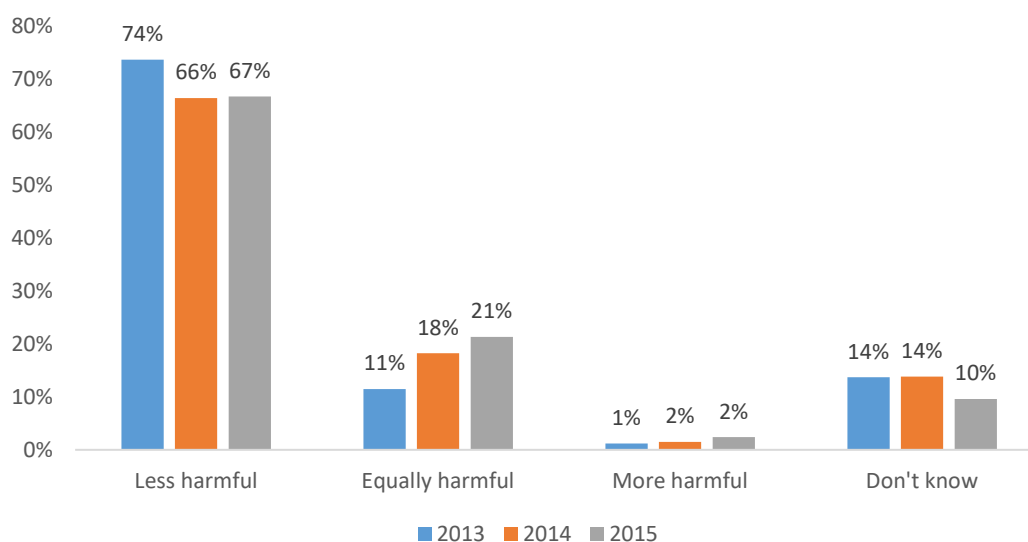
Ever tried electronic cigarettes by smoking status



Base: All 11-18 year olds (n=2,291)

Understanding of electronic cigarettes among children is generally good. Two thirds of children who have heard of electronic cigarettes believe correctly that they are less harmful than cigarettes to the user (67%) although this has fallen over time, with increasing numbers of children believing they are equally harmful. Between 2013 and 2015 the proportion believing that the electronic devices are as equally as harmful increased from 12% to 21%.

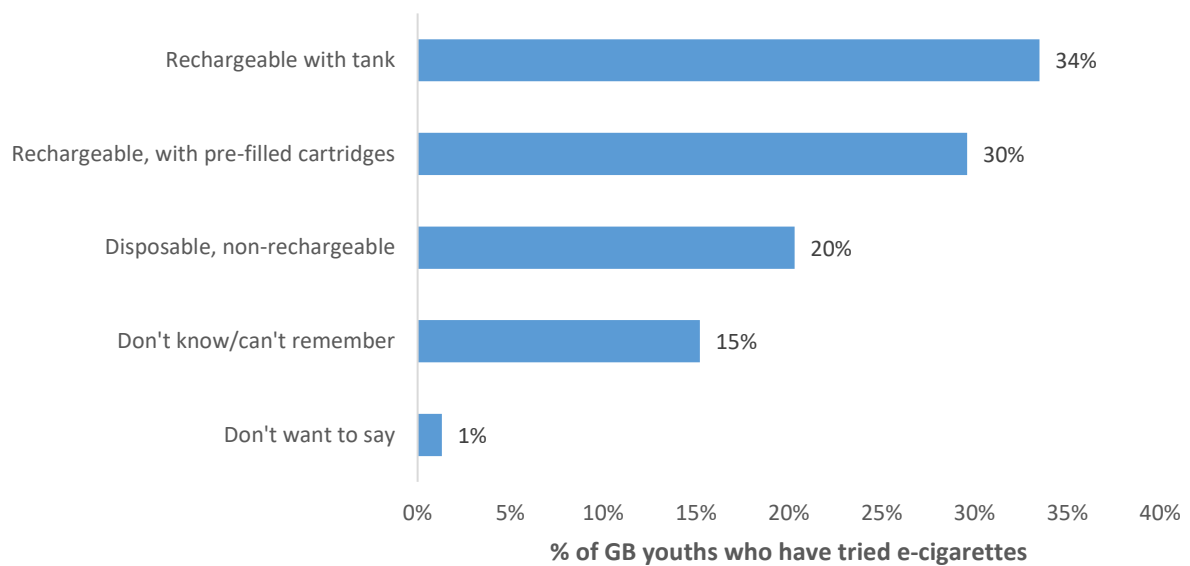
Perceptions of relative harmfulness of electronic cigarettes in comparison with tobacco cigarettes. ASH Smokefree GB youth surveys.



Unweighted base: 11-18 year olds who had heard of e-cigarettes (2013 = 1,428, 2014 = 1,716, 2015 = 2,143)

The most popular form of electronic cigarettes among children are those with a rechargeable tank (34%), followed by those with a pre-filled cartridge (30%). These figures includes those who had only tried e-cigarettes once or twice.

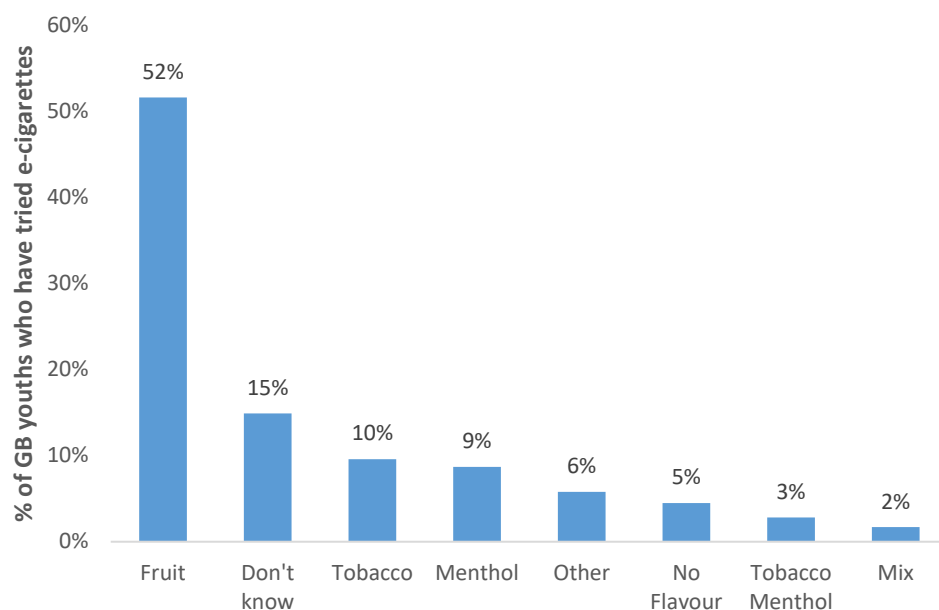
First type of e-cigarette tried by youth. ASH Smokefree GB Youth survey, 2015



Unweighted base: 11-18 year olds who had tried e-cigarettes (n=301)

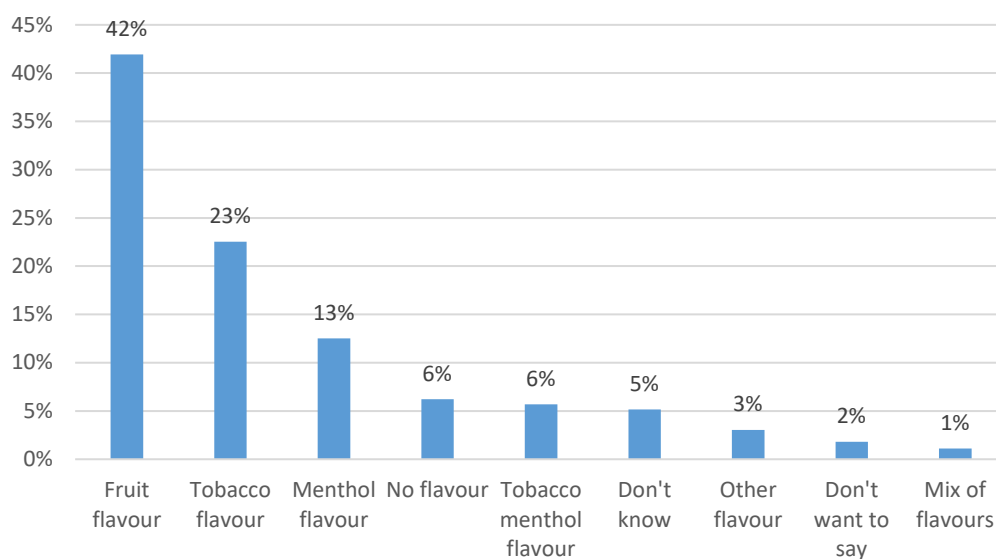
E-cigarettes come in a variety of flavours, particularly refillable 'tank' devices. Fruit flavour was by far the most popular flavour among young people. Fruit flavours were more popular among young people who no longer used electronic cigarettes and among young people who had tried electronic cigarettes but never smoked.

Last flavour tried by those who have tried but don't currently use electronic cigarettes, ASH Smokefree GB Youth survey, 2015



Unweighted base: 11-18 year olds who had tried e-cigarettes (n=242)

Flavour electronic cigarettes among current electronic cigarettes users, ASH Smokefree GB Youth survey, 2015



Unweighted base: 11-18 year olds who are current e-cigarette users (n=59)

This is the first time questions on use by type of product and flavour have been asked.

Comparison with other surveys

In 2014 questions on electronic cigarette use were added to surveys carried out in schools by Governments in Wales^{4,5} Scotland⁶ and England.^{7,8} The patterns of electronic cigarette use among all these surveys and the ASH Smokefree GB Youth survey are similar. The surveys taken together indicate that regular electronic cigarette use among young people is a relatively rare phenomenon and is largely among young people who smoke. The surveys do, however, show a higher level of ‘experimentation’ with electronic cigarettes (young people who have tried products one or twice). This too is much more common among children who smoke but can also be observed among children who have never smoked. Some differences between the surveys do exist – for example the high number of young people who had ‘ever tried’ electronic cigarettes in the Smoking, Drinking and Use (SDD) Survey was very high. These can be explained by differing methodologies and differently worded questions. For example, SDD prompts young people to consider use as ‘even a puff or two’ whereas the ASH Smokefree GB Youth survey does not include this prompt.

Table: E-cigarette use among young people

Source	Ever tried	Use less than once a week (but not just once or twice)	Use more than once a week	Use (at least monthly) in <i>never</i> smokers	Regular smokers who had tried e-cigarettes
ASH Smokefree GB youth survey (11-18 years) (2015 – March)	12.7%	1.9%	0.5%	0.1%	77%
Health Behaviour in School-aged Children, Wales (11-16 years) (Nov 2013 – Feb 2014)	12.3%	1.5% (use at least monthly)		0.3%	Not reported
CHETS Wales survey (10–11 year olds) 2014	5.8%	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported
SALSUS Scotland survey (15 and 13 year olds) 2013	12%	0.6%	0.5%	0%	66%
The smoking, drinking and drug use survey (11-15 year olds), 2014	22%	3%	1%	Not reported	89%
What about YOUth Survey (15 year olds). 2014	18%	2%	1%	0%	84%

As awareness of and experimentation with electronic cigarettes grows it might be expected that we will see more young people regularly using the products. This will be an important area to watch particularly as age of sale restrictions come into force in England in October 2015.⁹

For further information about electronic cigarettes please see the [ASH Website](#) or download the [ASH Briefing on Electronic Cigarettes](#) or the [ASH Factsheet on use of electronic cigarettes among adults](#).

¹ Total sample size was 2,291 teenagers aged 11-18. Fieldwork was undertaken between 6th and 22nd March 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of GB 11-18 year olds.

² Total sample size was 2,068 children aged 11-18. Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st March - 1st April 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of age, gender and region.

³ Total sample size was 2,178 children aged 11 to 18. Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st - 28th March 2013. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB aged 11 to 18.

⁴ Moore, G., et al. *Electronic-cigarette use among young people in Wales: evidence from two cross-sectional surveys*. BMJ Open, 2015; Apr 15;5(4):e007072.

⁵ Moore, G.F., et al. *E-cigarette use and intentions to smoke among 10-11-year-old never-smokers in Wales*. Tob Control, 2014: pii. tobaccocontrol-2014-052011. [Epub ahead of print]

⁶ ISD Scotland. *Scottish School's Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey (SALSUS) 2014*. 18 May 2015; Available from: <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Public-Health/SALSUS/>.

⁷ Hughes, K., et al. *Associations between e-cigarette access and smoking and drinking behaviours in teenagers*. BMC Public Health, 2015;15:244.

⁸ What About Youth? Study. Base =117,577 15 year olds in England for questions on e-cigarettes. <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB17984>

⁹ Regulations in the Children and Families Act will come into force in October 2015 introducing a ban on young people under the age of 18 buying e-cigarettes. It will also be an offence to purchase tobacco products or e-cigarettes on behalf of young people under the age of 18.