



**Digital**

# Smoking, drinking and drug use in young people, England 2021

## Smoking and e-cigarette use

Presented by:  
**Stephanie Gebert**



---

# 2021 Survey

The survey takes place in secondary schools, with pupils in years 7 to 11, mostly aged 11 to 15.

Since 2016, the survey has run every 2 years, however, the 2020 survey did not go ahead due to Covid-19 pandemic and was postponed to 2021.

- The survey was undertaken by Ipsos Mori
- The survey was undertaken between September 2021 and February 2022
- 119 schools took part in the survey
- 9,289 pupils in years 7 to 11 were surveyed

This survey collects information from a sample of the population. The sample is designed to represent the whole population as accurately as possible, within constraints of time and cost. Data are weighted to produce accurate estimates. The statistics based on surveys are estimates and are subject to a margin of error, in this case 95% confidence interval.

In 2021, new questions were added to assess the impact of the Covid-19 lockdowns and pandemic on these behaviours.

# Content of the survey

## Smoking cigarettes

- First collected in 1982
- Smoking prevalence
- Characteristics of smokers
- Attitudes to smoking

## Drinking Alcohol

- First collected in 1988
- Questions changed in 2016
- Prevalence of drinking alcohol and consequences

## Drug Use

- First collected in 2001
- Frequency of drug taking
- Types of drugs
- Attitudes to taking drugs

## E-cigarettes (vaping)

- First collected in 2014
- Extra questions added 2016
- E-cigarette use
- Sources of e-cigarette

## School lessons

- First collected in 2003
- Frequency of lessons
- Pupils recall of lessons
- Sources of info for lessons

## Wellbeing

- First collected in 2018
- Standardised questions
- Present them in context of recent behaviours

---

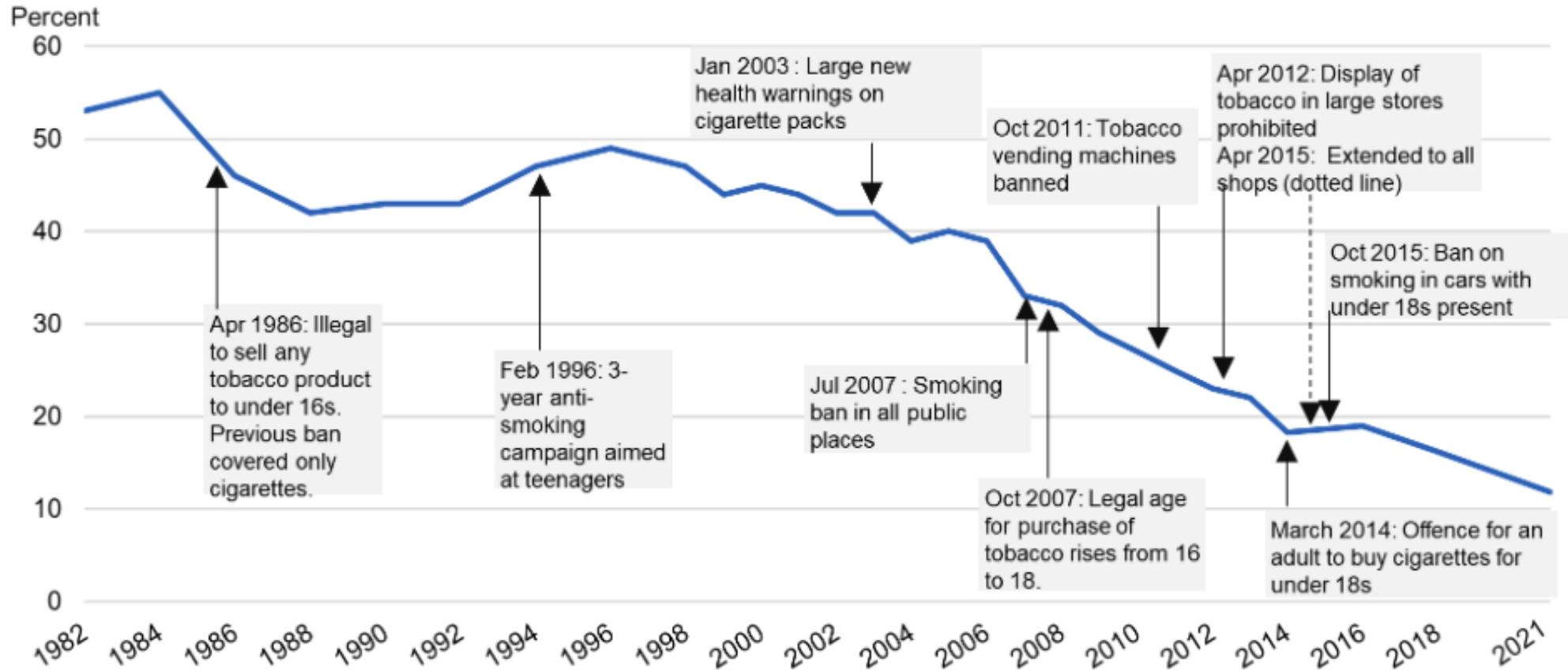
# Smoking Cigarettes

All pupils were asked about their cigarette smoking behaviour. Pupils were categorised in three ways based on the responses given:

- Regular smokers (defined as usually smoking at least one cigarette per week).
- Occasional smokers (defined as usually smoking less than one cigarette per week).
- Non-smokers.
- The term 'current smoker' used in this report includes regular and occasional smokers.

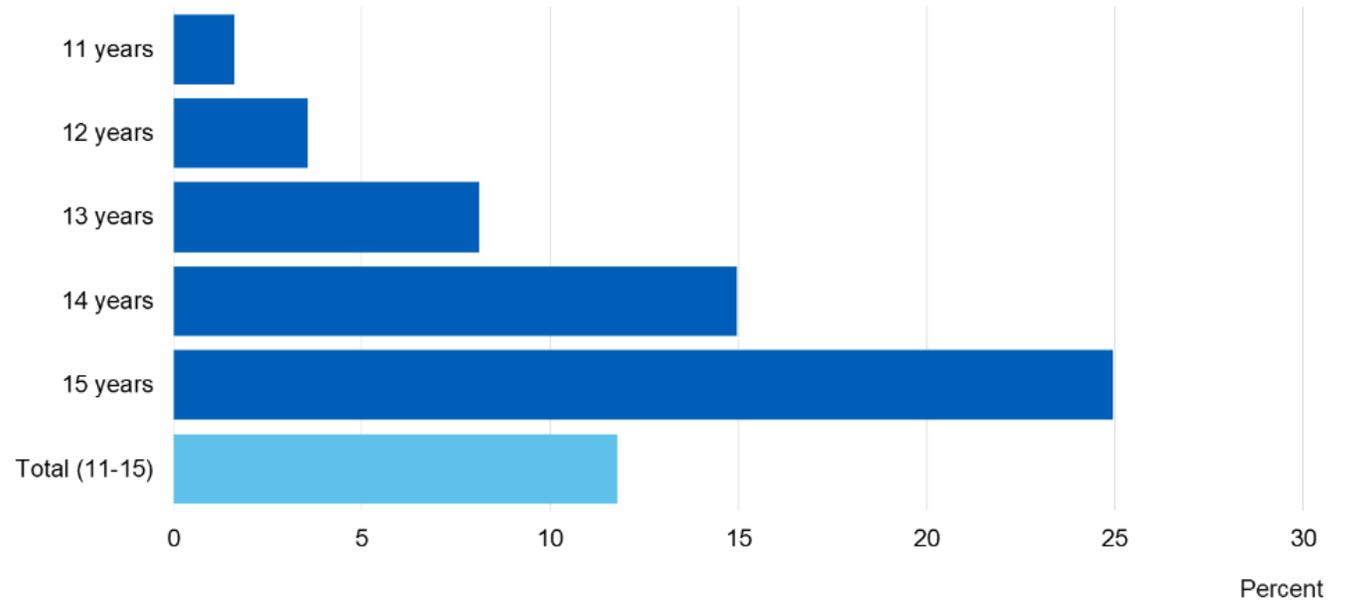
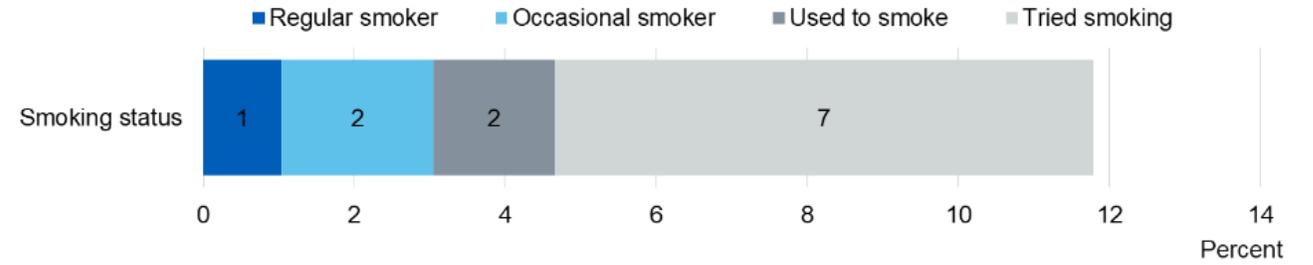
# Pupils who have ever smoked

There has been a steady decline in smoking since 1996 when 49% of pupils had smoked at least once. In 2021, 12% of pupil had ever smoked, down from 16% in 2018.



In 2021:

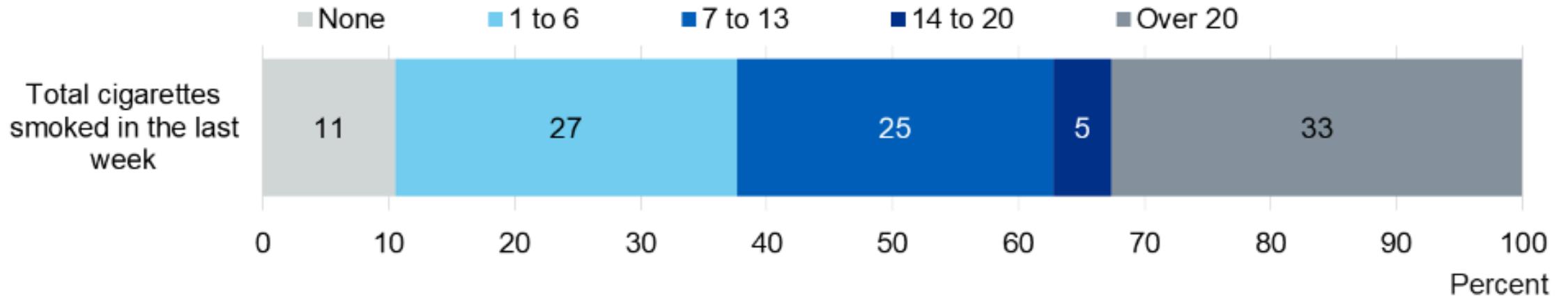
- 12% of pupils had ever smoked
  - 1% regular smokers
  - 2% used to smoke
  - 7% had tried smoking at least once
- Girls were more likely to have smoked than boys
  - 13% of girls
  - 10% of boys
- Proportion who smoke increases with age
  - 2% of 11 year olds
  - 25% of 15 year olds



# Cigarettes smoked in the last week (regular smokers)

A third (33%) of regular smokers said they smoked more than 20 cigarettes in the last week. Down from 45% in 2018.

Mean cigarettes smoked 19.5 in 2021, down from 24.7 in 2018 and 44.1 in 2007.



---

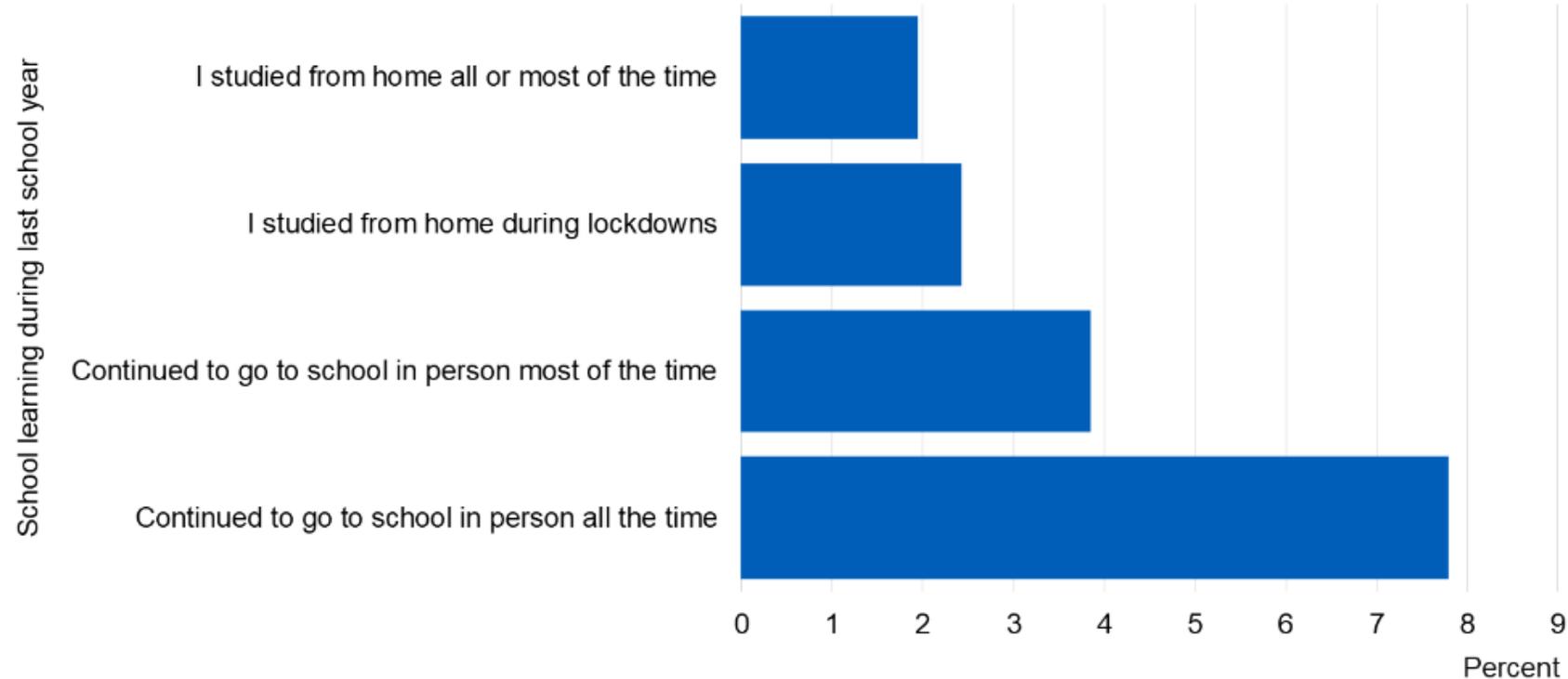
# New questions on Covid-19

New questions were added to the survey to investigate how impact of lockdown on behaviours.

- How often have you met other people outside your household/school?
- School learning in the last academic year:
  - I studied from home all or most of the time
  - I studied from home during lockdowns
  - Continued to go to school in person most of the time
  - Continued to go to school in person all of the time

# Current smoking compared to how they took part in school learning in the last year

Pupils who continued to go to school all the time in the last year were more like to be current smokers (8%), than those who studied at home during lockdowns all or most of the time (2%).

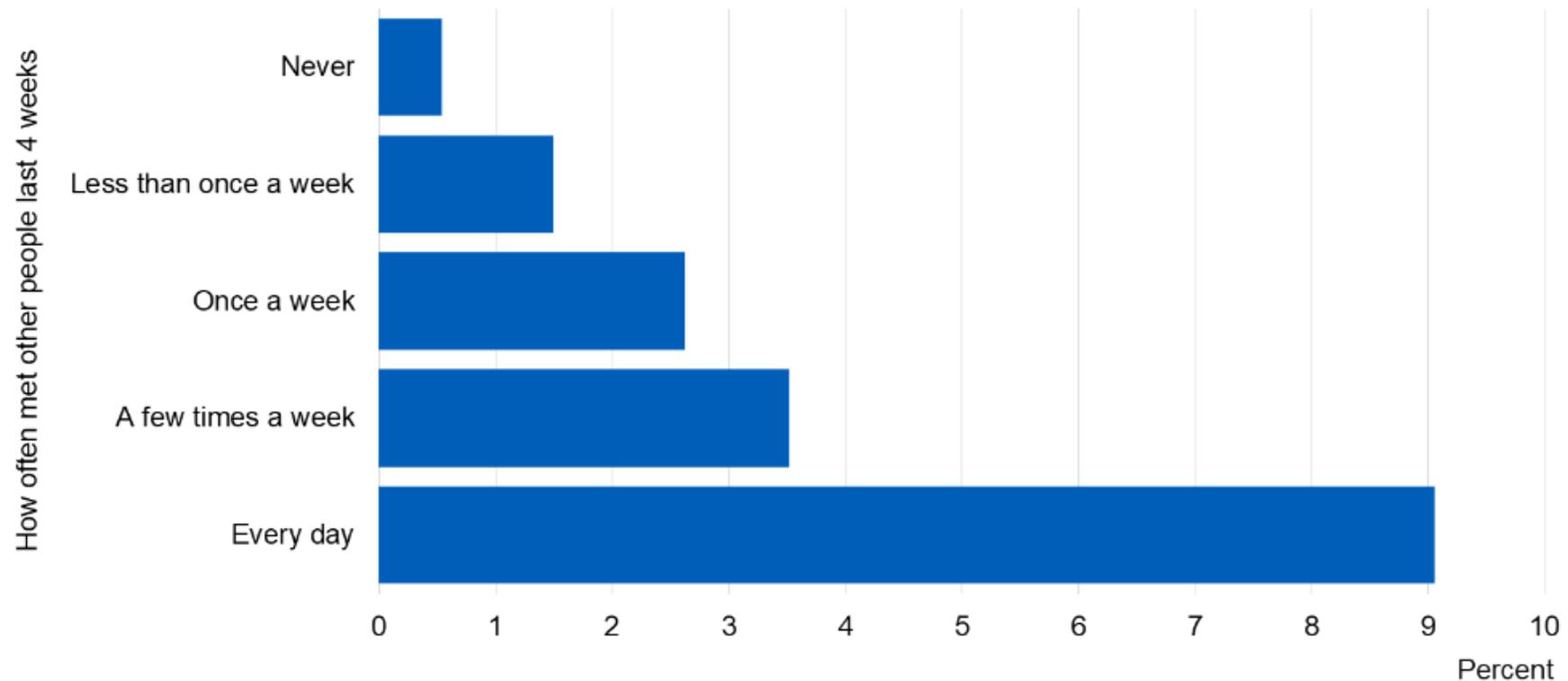


# Current smokers, by how many times they people

9% of pupils who had met other people outside of home/school every were current smokers.

3% of pupils who met people once a week were current smokers.

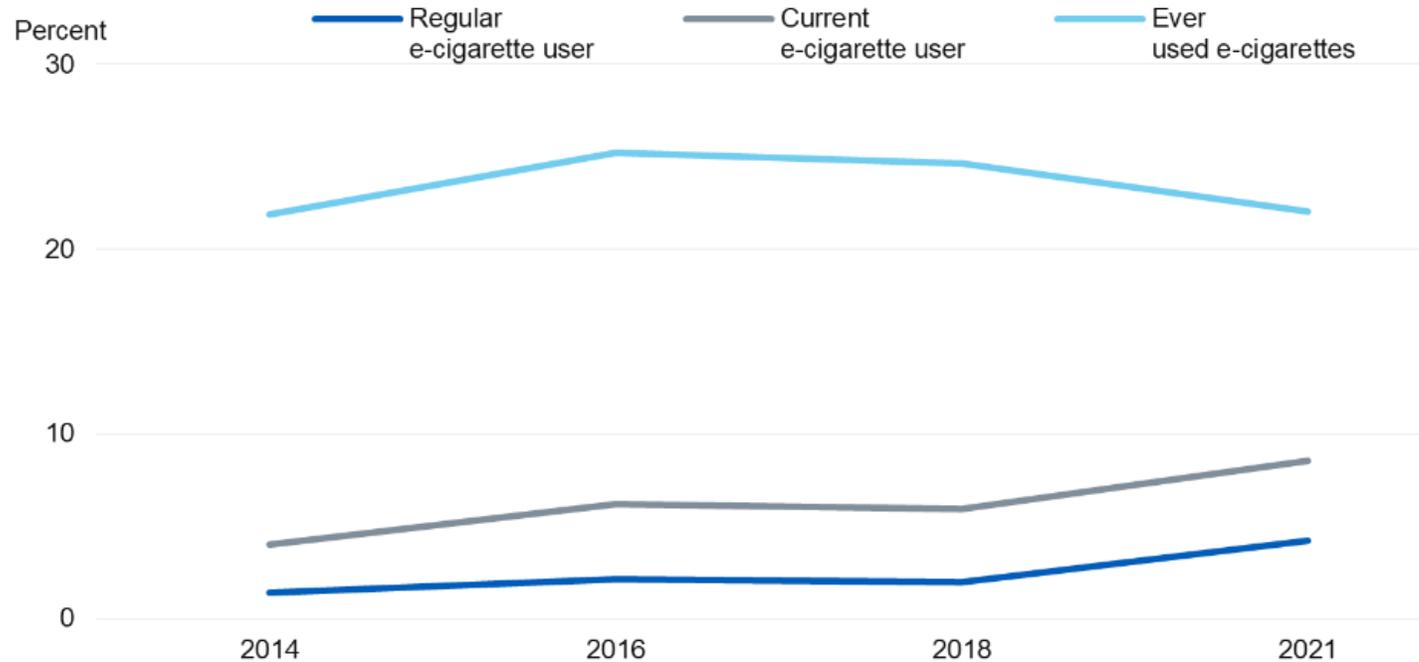
1% of pupils who never met other people were current smokers.



# E-cigarettes (vaping)

The proportion of current e-cigarette users has increased from 6% in 2018 to 9% in 2021.

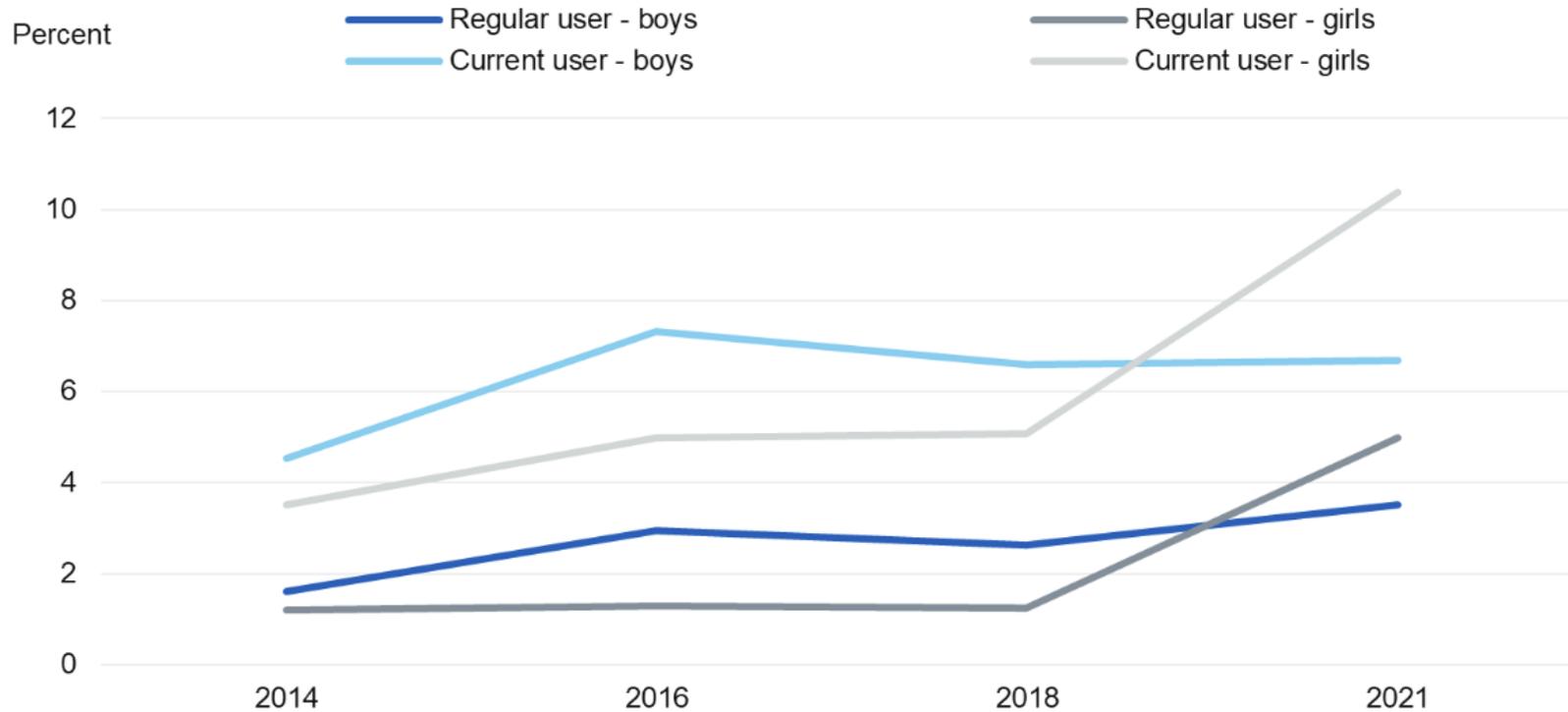
The same pattern was not seen in lifetime use, 22% of pupils had ever used e-cigarettes compared to 25% in 2018 (not a statistically significant change).



Girls were more likely than boys to be current e-cigarette users:

- 10% for girls
- 7% of boys.

Regular use was similar in boys and girls.

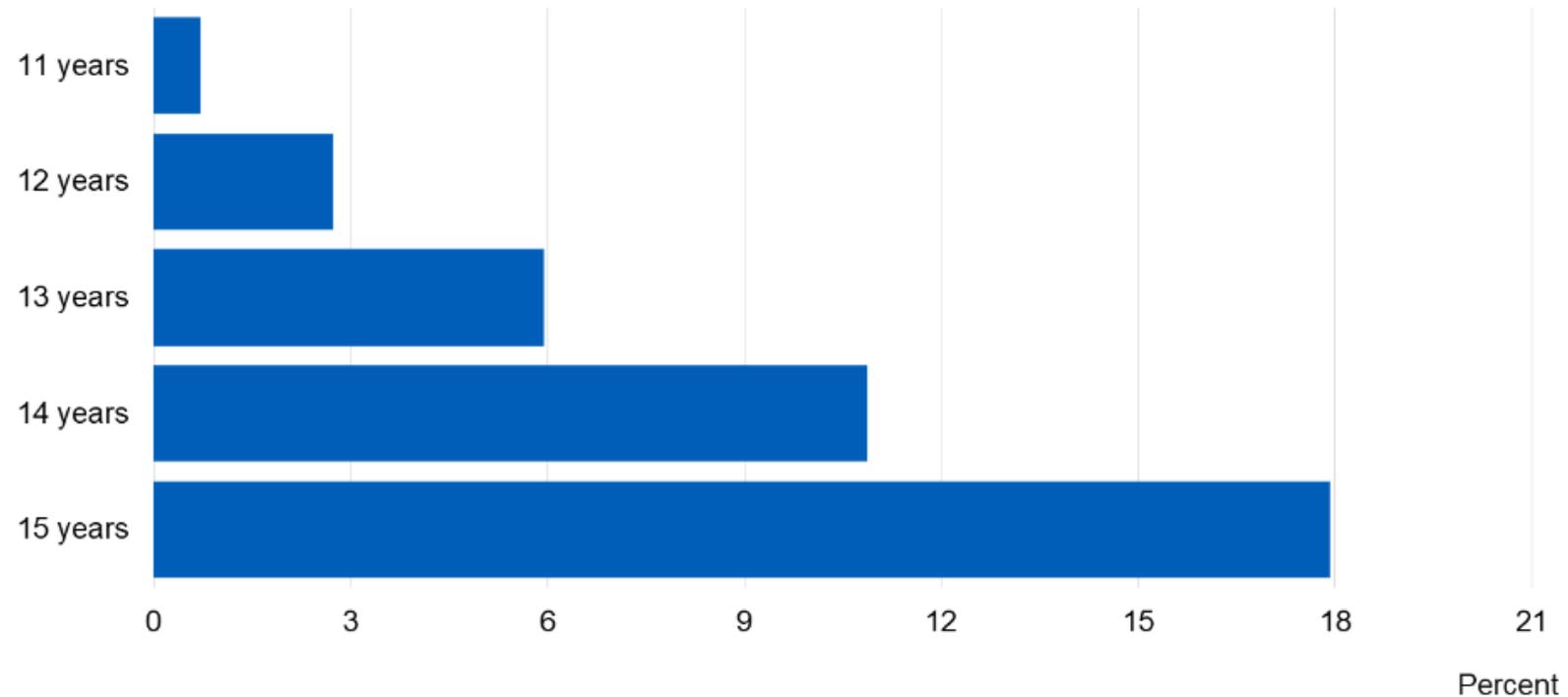


Current e-cigarette use increased with age from 1% of 11 year olds, to 11% of 14 year olds and 18% of 15 year olds.

Current e-cigarette use for 15 year old girls increased from 10% in 2018 to 21% in 2021.

# Current e-cigarette use

Current e-cigarette use increased with age from 1% of 11 year olds, to 11% of 14 year olds and 18% of 15 year olds. Current e-cigarette use for 15 year old girls increased from 10% in 2018 to 21% in 2021.



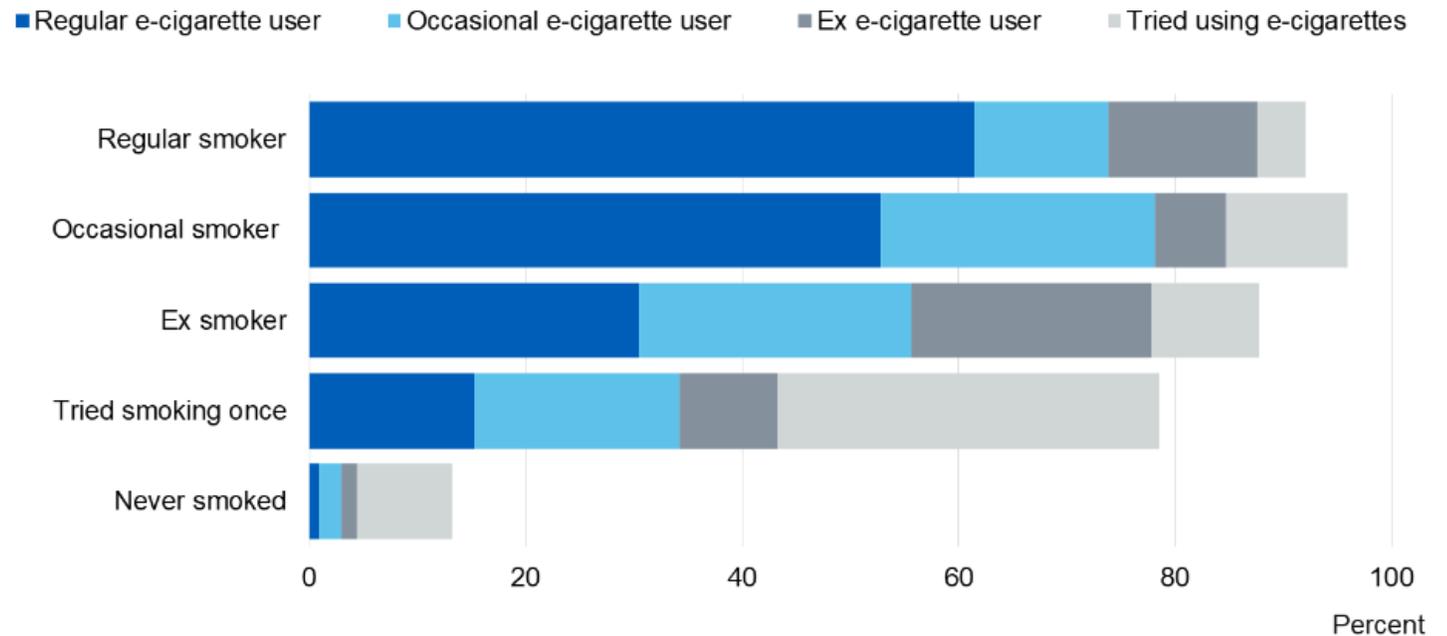
# E-Cigarettes, by cigarette smoking status

Pupils who had ever smoked were much more likely to also have ever used an e-cigarette, than those who had never smoked.

56% of ex-smokers were current e-cigarette users.

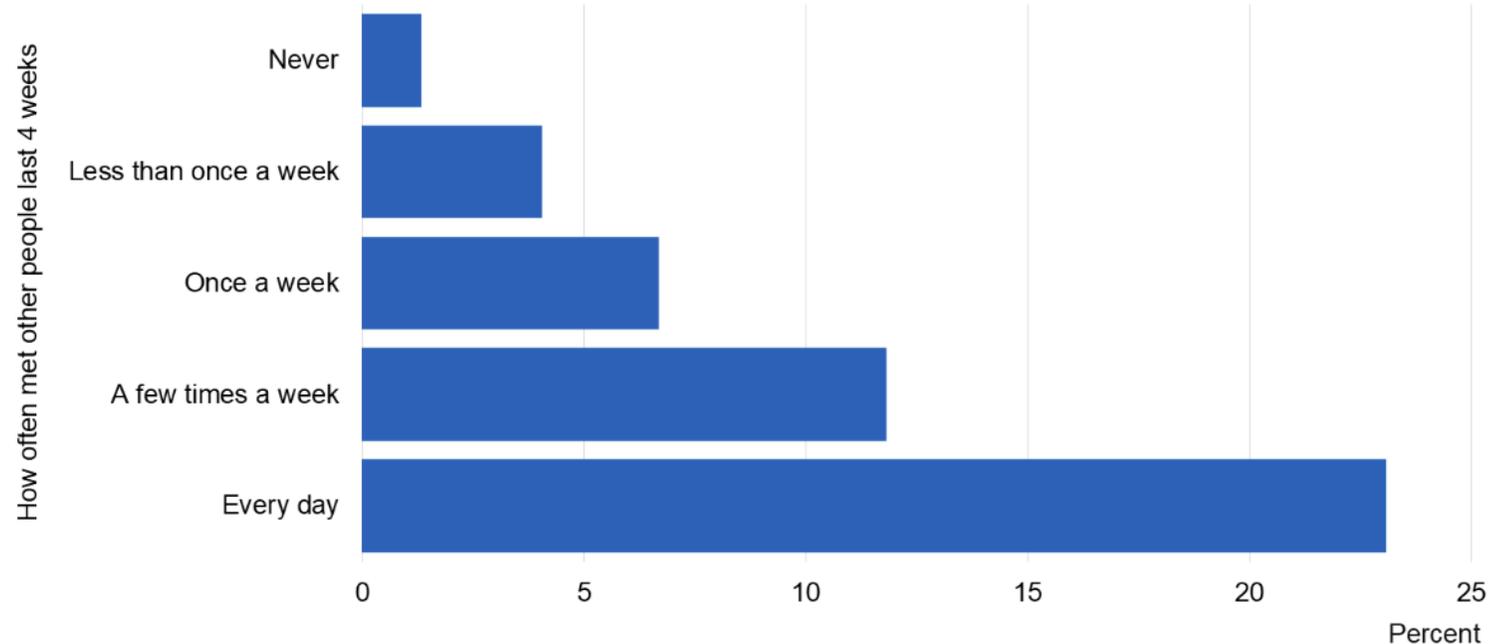
Most regular smokers (92%) reported having ever used e-cigarettes. This compares to just 13% of pupils who had never smoked.

Regular smokers who were regular e-cigarette users has more than doubled; from 29% in 2018 to 61% in 2021. Only 1% of pupils who had never smoked were regular e-cigarette users.



# Impact of Covid-19 lockdowns on e-cigarette prevalence

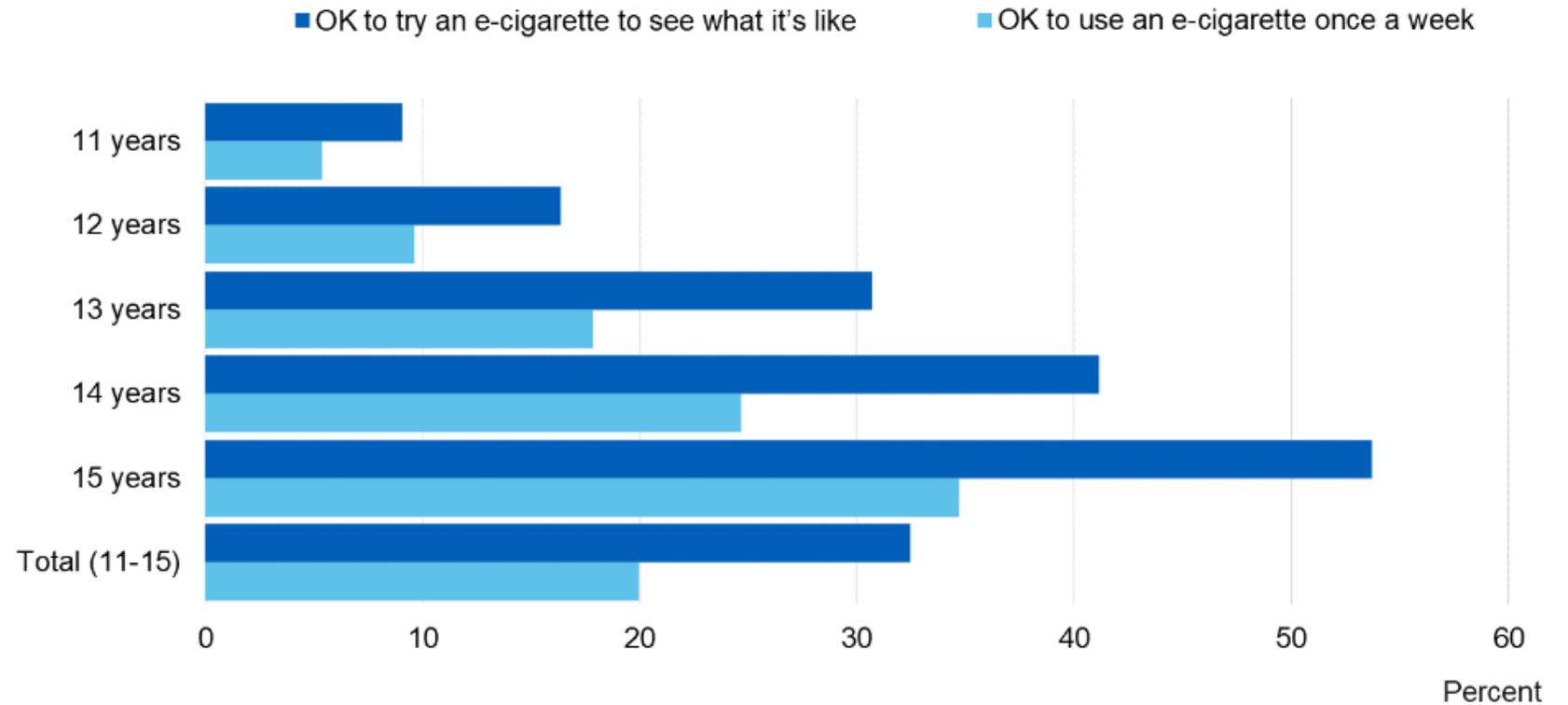
Pupils who met people outside of home/school more frequently in the last 4 weeks were more likely to be current e-cigarette users. 1% of pupils who never met people outside were current e-cigarette users compared to 23% of pupils who met people every day.



Looking at the new question on how pupils took part in school learning in the previous year; pupils who continued to go to school all the time in the last year were twice as likely to be current e-cigarette users (14%) than those who studied at home all the time (7%).

# Attitudes to e-Cigarettes use

- Despite the increase in vaping, the proportion of pupils who thought it was ok to try or use e-cigarettes has fallen compared to 2018.
- 32% of pupils thought it was ok for people their own age to try an e-cigarette to see what was like compared to 36% in 2018.
- 20% of pupils thought it was ok for someone their age to use e-cigarettes once a week compared to 24% in 2018.
- A positive attitude to e-cigarettes increased with age.



---

# Further information is available on the following websites

Link to the 2021 smoking drinking and drug use publication: <http://digital.nhs.uk/pubs/sdd21>

To access the code used to create the publication: <https://github.com/NHSDigital/Smoking-Drinking-and-Drug-Use-Report-Code>

To apply for access to the anonymised underlying data via the UK data service: <https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/>



**NHS**  
Digital

---

# Thank You



**@nhsdigital**



**company/nhs-digital**



**digital.nhs.uk**