

**Star-Ledger** ([www.nj.com](http://www.nj.com))

## **Smoking down, vaping up among U.S. teens, studies show**

Tim Darragh on December 17, 2014 at 8:30 AM, updated December 17, 2014 at 8:44 AM

[tdarragh@njadvancemedia.com](mailto:tdarragh@njadvancemedia.com)

Teen smoking rates are tumbling across the United States, a new nationwide survey shows, but that good news is being offset by a huge wave of e-cigarette use. The **2014 Monitoring the Future survey**, released Tuesday by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, found that smoking cigarettes within the past month was down to 8 percent among the 40,000-50,000 eighth, 10th and 12th graders surveyed nationwide.

In 1997, the recent peak year, 28 percent of that group reported having smoked.

"The importance of this major decline in smoking for the health and longevity of this generation of young people cannot be overstated," said Lloyd Johnston, the principal investigator.

The smoking rates among the three groups are at historic lows, according to the survey.

But one regional anti-smoking advocate, while cheered by any good news about reduced smoking rates, said the decline in teen smoking probably was more significant in states other than New Jersey.

"These are national figures," said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy of Summit. "Our state numbers haven't declined."

According to the latest New Jersey Department of Health data from 2012, 13.6 percent of Garden State high school students smoked within 30 days of the survey. It did show a big drop from 2010, when the smoking rate was 22.2 percent, but Blumenfeld noted that Hurricane Sandy limited the number of students who participated.

Blumenfeld said she was not surprised but disturbed to see the institute's finding that teens' use of e-cigarettes, which contain nicotine, surpassed that of tobacco products for the first time.

The institute's survey showed that 9 percent of eighth-graders reported using the battery-operated vaporizers in the past 30 days, compared to 4 percent who smoked a tobacco cigarette. For 10th graders, e-cigarette use topped tobacco use 16 percent to 7 percent. Among 12th graders, e-cigarettes led tobacco 17 percent to 14 percent.

And those figures, Blumenfeld said, may be conservative.

Two recent studies of high school and middle school students in Connecticut and Hawaii showed much higher use of e-cigarettes. In particular, the Hawaiian students showed that **29 percent of high school students surveyed reported having smoked e-cigarettes** in 2013, said the study published online in the journal Pediatrics.

In New Jersey, state law prohibits the sale of e-cigarettes to people under 19. **Youths, however, are getting the devices from their parents**, said Suchitra Krishnan-Sarin of Yale Medical School, whose study was published last month in the journal Nicotine and Tobacco Research.

“Our evidence also suggests that, while peers continue to be a major source of e-cigarette procurement for adolescents, many adolescents reported that they obtained their e-cigarettes from their parents,” the study said.

Blumenfeld said New Jersey needs to do more to limit access to e-cigarettes, which are unregulated, and tobacco.

For example, municipalities can license retailers of e-cigarettes. Cranford, Hillside, Mountainside, Summit and Westfield have ordinances requiring sellers of e-cigarettes to register and pay a licensing fee, she said. Other communities such as Englewood, Teaneck and Sayreville also have adopted ordinances prohibiting the sale of tobacco to anyone under 21.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has proposed a rule to regulate e-cigarettes as it regulates tobacco. If it adopts a final rule, FDA could issue national rules regulating sales and conduct studies to determine the safety of the devices.

But supporters of e-cigarettes say that while it's better if young people use neither tobacco nor e-cigarettes, the use of the devices at least has protected some youths from the greater harm of cigarette smoke.

“This study and others suggest that the availability of vapor products may have

stopped many youth from becoming smokers over the last three years,” said Gregory Conley, president of the American Vaping Association.

Johnston, the lead investigator of the institute’s study, said e-cigarettes are not a panacea.

"Despite the positive developments this year, we are concerned about the levels of e-cigarette use among teens that we are seeing,” he said. “It would be a tragedy if this product undid some of the great progress made to date in reducing cigarette smoking by teens."

[http://www.nj.com/healthfit/index.ssf/2014/12/smoking\\_down\\_vaping\\_up\\_among\\_us\\_teens\\_studies\\_show.html#incart\\_related\\_stories](http://www.nj.com/healthfit/index.ssf/2014/12/smoking_down_vaping_up_among_us_teens_studies_show.html#incart_related_stories)