
DOJ, FDA Illicit E-Cigarette Task Force Marks Critical Step in Combatting Youth Vaping Crisis

Retailers also have a responsibility to protect young people by immediately removing illegal e-cigarettes from store shelves

Statement from Kathy Crosby, Truth Initiative CEO and President

WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 12, 2024) – The announcement by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on the creation of a federal multi-agency task force to crack down on the sale of illegal e-cigarettes marks an important step in protecting our nation’s youth from the dangers of these illicit youth-appealing products. Over the past several years, illegal e-cigarettes have flooded the market, with fruity flavors and easy access driving youth initiation — and, ultimately, nicotine addiction. [Truth Initiative research shows](#) that between 2017 and 2022, disposable e-cigarettes nearly tripled in nicotine strength, quintupled in e-liquid capacity, and dropped in price by nearly 70%. While we applaud the DOJ and FDA for their decisive action, retailers also have a responsibility to protect young people and must immediately remove illegal e-cigarettes from their shelves. To date, the FDA has only authorized 23 tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes. Brands like JUUL and Vuse, which are popular with young people, also remain on the market while their applications are still under FDA review. Together, these not yet reviewed brands, along with the illegal products, pose a significant threat to the health and well-being of young people.

Stores sell thousands of unauthorized e-cigarettes. Illicit products are also sold online and through social media platforms like TikTok, further ramping up their appeal. A study published in Tobacco Control earlier this year showed that [“discreet shipping” on TikTok](#) enables the sale of e-cigarettes to youth. This practice, which hides e-cigarettes in candy, cosmetics and beauty items, is just one of the latest ways vendors target young people through social media and online platforms to make tobacco products more appealing and accessible. In addition, a separate study also published this year in Tobacco Control finds that most online e-cigarette shops [rely on age self-certification](#), which youth can easily exploit to access these products.

The result is that youth e-cigarette use remains a serious public health threat, with the latest [National Youth Tobacco Survey](#) showing more than 2 million high school and middle school students use e-cigarettes, with one in four vaping daily. Not only is nicotine harmful to developing brains, but the high rates of daily use



are also suggestive of a nicotine addiction. As the tobacco industry continues to flood the market with illicit high-nicotine, cheap and youth-appealing flavored products like cotton candy and gummy bear at the expense of young people's physical and mental health, retailers bear a pivotal responsibility in curbing youth e-cigarette use in their communities. We urge all retailers to act swiftly and in compliance with these regulations to ensure a safer future for our youth.

About Truth Initiative®

Truth Initiative is a national nonprofit public health organization committed to a future free from lifelong addiction, fostering healthier lives and a more resilient nation. Our mission is to prevent youth and young adult nicotine addiction and empower quitting for all. Through our evidence-based, market-leading cessation EX Program and the nationally recognized **truth**® public education campaign, we are leading the fight against youth and young adult tobacco use, which threatens to put a new generation at risk of nicotine addiction. Our first-of-its-kind text message quit vaping program, This Is Quitting, has enrolled over 750,000 young people across the country, and our youth e-cigarette prevention curriculum, *Vaping: Know the truth*®, is currently implemented in over 9,000 schools nationwide, reaching a total of over one million students thus far. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco, and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment continue to contribute to ending one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington, D.C., our organization was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories, and the tobacco industry. To learn more, visit truthinitiative.org.

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