



**MESA COUNTY  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

**YOUTH TOBACCO USE AND ATTITUDES**

# **SPECIAL REPORT**

**2023**



# Prevention and cessation of tobacco use among youth is a priority in Mesa County.

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## Background

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death in the United States.

Attitudes about and access to tobacco products impact youth initiation, quit rates, and secondhand smoke exposure.

Tobacco use among youth is an area in which public health partners and the community can make impact based on current resources, political will, and community readiness.

## Definitions

### Tobacco product

Defined in Colorado Statute as "any product that contains nicotine or tobacco or is derived from tobacco and is intended to be ingested or inhaled by or applied to the skin of an individual." **This includes traditional tobacco products such as cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, and electronic vapor products.**

### Electronic vapor product or Vaping

A non-combustible **product containing nicotine that employs a mechanical heating element, battery, or circuit**, regardless of shape or size, that can be used to heat a nicotine solution, and includes but is not limited to a cartridge or other container of such nicotine solution, **an electronic cigarette, an electronic cigar, an electronic cigarillo, or an electronic pipe.**

### Students

Throughout this report, **the term "students" is used to refer to high school students.** These data are from the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, administered every two years to schools across Colorado.

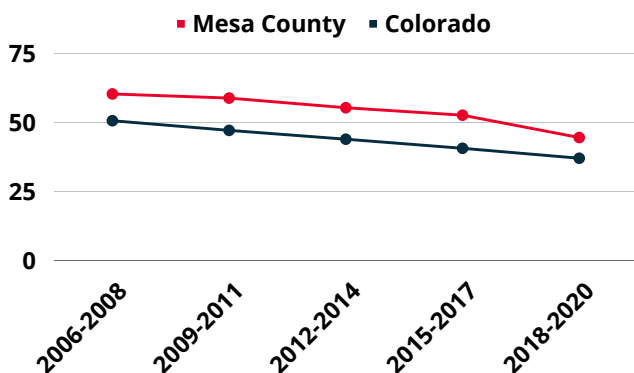


# Health Outcomes related to Tobacco Use

**Adults in Mesa County regularly use tobacco products at higher rates compared to the statewide average.** The long-term health outcomes related to tobacco use reflect this in our community.



Mesa County has a higher rate of lung and bronchus cancer than Colorado; however, that gap has been closing over the last two years.



AGE-ADJUSTED RATE OF LUNG AND BRONCHUS CANCER IN MESA COUNTY AND COLORADO (2006-2020)

**One of the top ten leading causes of early death before age 65 in Mesa County is Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease** which includes COPD, Bronchitis, Emphysema, and Asthma.

Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease is responsible for more early death in Mesa County than when compared to the state as a whole.

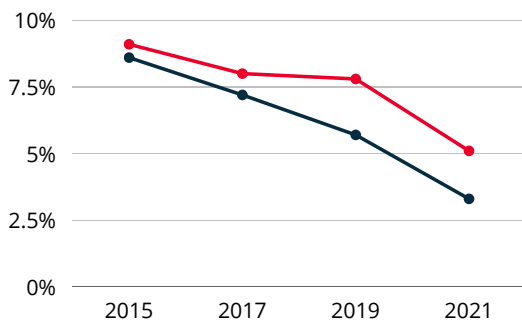


Lung and Bronchus Cancers and Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases are also among the **leading causes of overall death in Mesa County.**

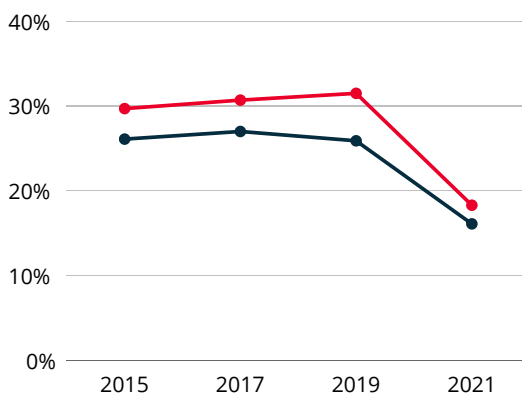


# Tobacco Use and Attitudes among Youth - Metrics and Trends

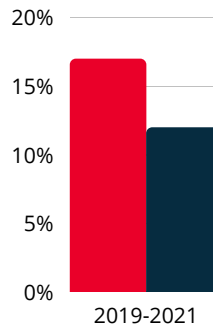
■ Mesa County ■ Colorado



PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO SMOKED CIGARETTES IN THE LAST 30 DAYS IN MESA COUNTY AND COLORADO (2015-2021)

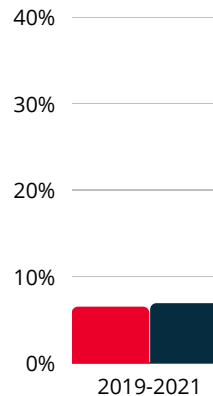


PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO USED AN ELECTRONIC VAPOR PRODUCT IN THE LAST 30 DAYS IN MESA COUNTY AND COLORADO (2015-2021)



CURRENT CIGARETTE SMOKING AMONG ADULTS IN MESA COUNTY AND COLORADO (2019-2021)

**61%** of high school students had never tried either cigarettes or vaping.



CURRENT USE OF ELECTRONIC VAPOR PRODUCTS AMONG ADULTS IN MESA COUNTY AND COLORADO (2019-2021)

**52%** of students who had ever tried vaping continued into regular, ongoing use.



**17% of adults in Mesa County report regularly smoking cigarettes. This rate is higher among women who recently gave birth (27%).** This is likely an indicator that tobacco use is higher among younger adults. This rate is similar to the percentage of students who report secondhand smoke exposure.

Mesa County has seen a decrease in youth who report smoking cigarettes; however, **this percentage is still higher compared with prevalence statewide.** The percentage of high school students who regularly vape was increasing through 2019, but in 2021 **usage among students dropped dramatically.**

This may be a result of national and statewide policy changes. In 2019, the legal sales age for tobacco changed to 21 nationwide, and the Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act expanded to include e-cigarettes. In 2021, Proposition EE raised nicotine tax to 30% and the rate will continue to rise until it reaches 62% in 2027. **Currently there is a 50% tax for nicotine products.**

Even with the dramatic drop in the percentage of students who regularly vape, **Mesa County high school students are still 3x more likely to vape than to smoke cigarettes.**

A much higher percentage of students who had ever tried vaping continued doing so regularly compared to those who tried smoking cigarettes.



The rates of students who try tobacco products before age 13 in Mesa County are nearly double those statewide. This has important implications for prevention. Consider opportunities to increase prevention for elementary and middle schoolers.

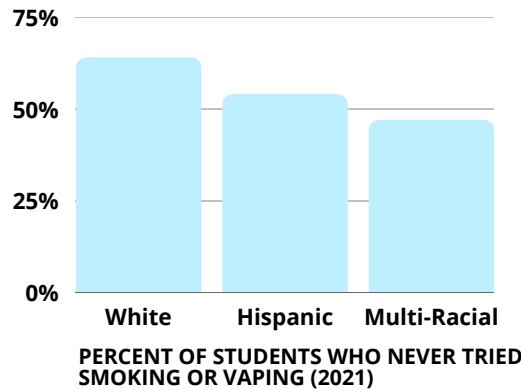
**12%**

of Mesa County students try tobacco products before age 13.

### DISPARITIES IN TOBACCO USE BY DEMOGRAPHICS

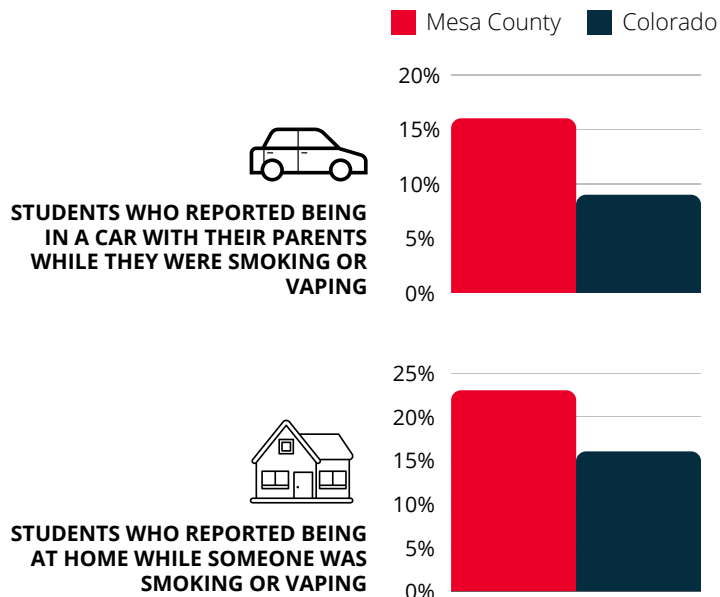
These data were explored by a variety of demographic variables including age, gender identity, sexuality, and race and ethnicity. **There was no statistical difference in usage according to gender or sexuality.**

White students are more likely to have never tried smoking cigarettes or vaping **compared to Hispanic and Multi-racial students.**



## Second hand exposure

25% of students had been exposed to secondhand smoke during the past seven days, either in their home or in a car or both. **This rate is higher in Mesa County compared to the statewide rate.**

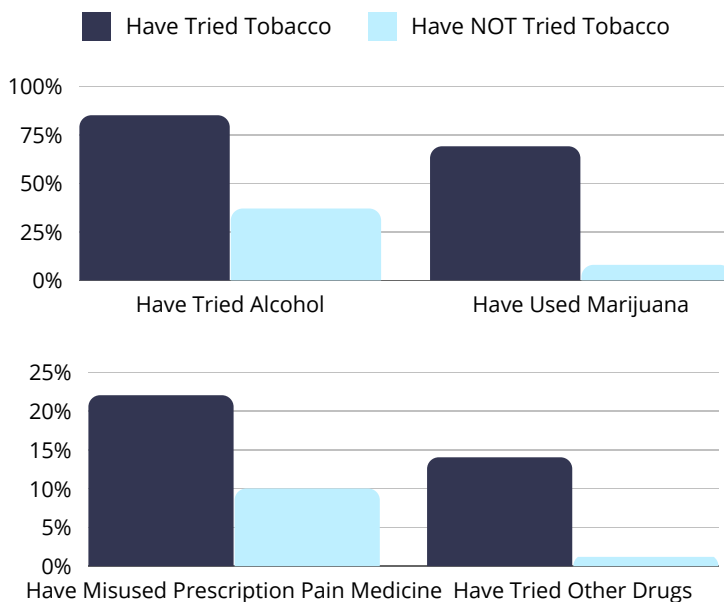


## DATA INSIGHTS



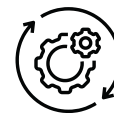
- Consider increasing **outreach to parents who use tobacco products** on how that can impact the health of their children and family members.
- Among women who recently gave birth in Mesa County, **about half reported that a healthcare worker discussed how secondhand smoke could affect their baby.** This is comparable to similar statewide numbers.
- Trying tobacco products (either smoking cigarettes or vaping) is **highly correlated with other substance use.**
- When compared to students who have never tried tobacco products, **students who have tried using tobacco are 2x more likely to drink alcohol or misuse prescription drugs, 8x more likely to use marijuana, and 10x more likely to use other drugs.** This might be an indication of shared risk and protective factors. Opportunities for impact should include going beyond cessation programs to address upstream factors that contribute to these health behaviors.

## Correlation with Other Substance Use



*Other Drugs include cocaine, inhalants, heroin, meth, and/or ecstasy.*

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT



- **Enhance education around tobacco use for youth and emphasize the harmful effects of vaping.** Introduce education around tobacco and nicotine to youth at a younger age to counteract the young initiation of use age.
- **Offer education opportunities to Hispanic and Multi-racial youth and parents** to address the higher smoking and vaping rates.
- Offer education to parents on the impact of tobacco use on youth and **how to have conversations with kids about nicotine products.**
- Adapt local policies in response to current trends to **make it more difficult for youth to access nicotine products and devices.**
- Enhance the **education around secondhand and thirdhand smoke and vapor exposure and the associated risks.**

## Attitudes regarding tobacco use among youth

*Electronic vapor product use among youth was found to be strongly impacted by students' perceptions of prevalence of use among their peers and by whether their family and friends also use tobacco products. Addressing attitudes and perceptions of tobacco use will likely have a strong impact on prevention and cessation.*

*The number one reason students gave for trying vaping was that a friend or family member uses them as well.*

*While cigarette smoking rates for Mesa County adults have decreased from 2016 to 2021, the rates are still higher than the statewide rate. Vaping rates for Mesa County adults have increased from 2016 to 2021.*

## TOP 3 REASONS STUDENTS TRY VAPING



**Friend or family member used them**



**Availability of flavors**



**Considered less harmful than other forms of tobacco**

### Student perception of the prevalence of use among their peers.

Students who have ever tried vaping are more likely to believe that the majority of their peers (5 or more out of 10) use electronic vapor products.

**71% of students who have tried vaping believe the majority of their peers vape,** compared to only 51% among students who had never tried.

### Disparities in Adult and Student Attitudes toward Tobacco Use.

**88% of students believe their parents think it is wrong** or very wrong for kids to use electronic vapor products.

However, only 65% of students agree that it is wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use electronic vapor products.

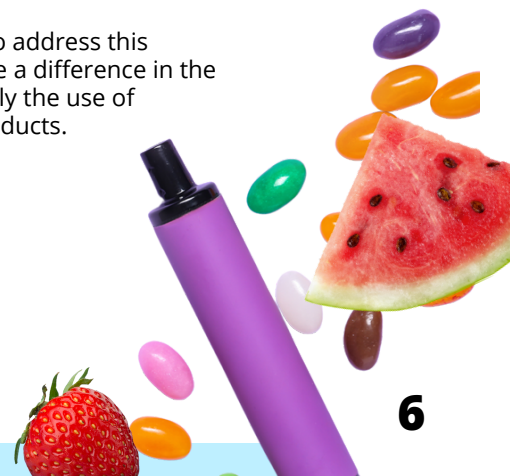
### How Students View Risk of Harm from Tobacco Use.

**High school students believe that smoking cigarettes is more harmful than vaping.** A majority of Mesa County youth (62%) perceive smoking 1 or more packs of cigarettes every day as a great risk, while only one-third of students believe that vaping everyday poses great risk.

We see this belief reflected in current use rates between vaping and smoking.

**Students are 3x more likely to vape than to smoke cigarettes,** and one of the top three reasons that students gave for vaping is the belief that it is less harmful than other tobacco products.

Prevention efforts to address this perception will make a difference in the appeal and ultimately the use of electronic vapor products.



## Quit Attempts

From the Surgeon General's Smoking Cessation Report, "Nationally, more than two-thirds of smokers say they want to quit, and every day thousands try to quit. **But because nicotine is highly addictive, it takes most smokers multiple attempts to quit for good.**"

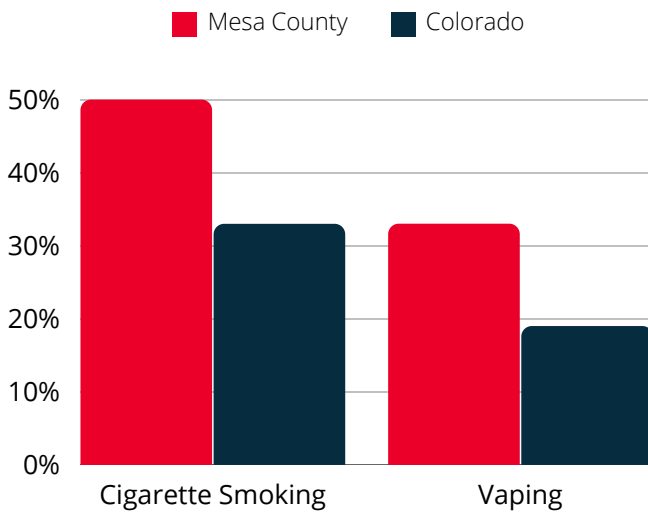
Quitting can be hard and we want people of all ages in Mesa County to be aware of the resources available to assist them with cessation.



Among students who used electronic vapor products during the past 12 months, **60% had tried to quit.**

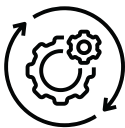


Among adults who were current cigarette smokers in Mesa County, **63% had tried to quit in the past year.**



**PERCENT OF WOMEN WHO WERE CURRENT USERS WHO CONTINUED SMOKING OR VAPING IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS OF PREGNANCY IN MESA COUNTY AND COLORADO (2018-2021)**

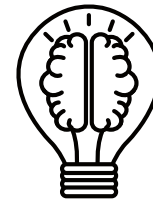
### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT



**Raise awareness** of cessation services available to help and support adults and youth who are trying to quit.

**Encourage conversations** between patients and doctors about tobacco and nicotine use and cessation resources, especially among women who are or may become pregnant.

### DATA INSIGHTS



- Pregnant women in Mesa County who have vaped during the past 2 years are **3x more likely to vape during pregnancy compared to the rest of the state.** In whole numbers, each year this is only about 60 women who continue vaping throughout their pregnancy out of about 120 current users (given an average of about 1600 births per year in Mesa County from 2018 to 2021).
- This may currently be a small-scale issue, but **vaping use has been trending upward statewide among adults**, and particularly so among youth.
- **As of 2021, 35% of high school students had tried vaping** and among those 50% were current users of electronic nicotine products. As these high school students become adults, this small scale issue is likely to grow significantly.





# Risk and Protective Factors

**Risk and protective factors play vital roles** in impacting the likelihood of certain outcomes for students, such as substance use.

While protective factors improve the likelihood of positive outcomes, risk factors impact the likelihood of negative outcomes occurring.

Protective factors, including strong family support and guidance, family economic stability, and social connection through extracurricular activities, have a strong impact on tobacco use among youth, as well as empowering them for greater success and resilience against many negative health behaviors and outcomes.



## RISK FACTORS

Characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that are associated with an increase in a person's risk of illness, injury, or harm.

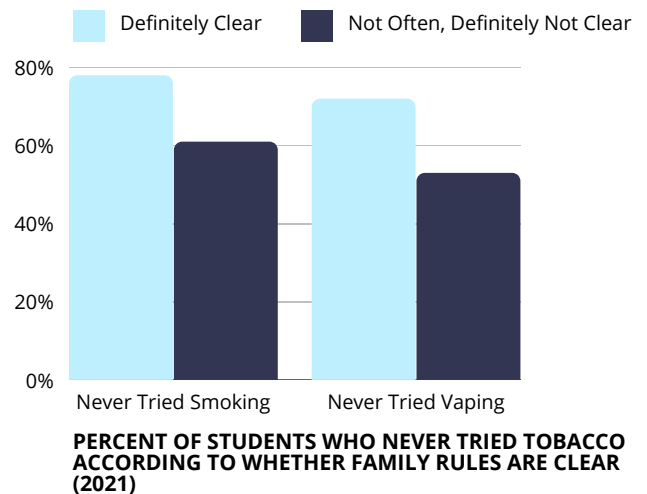
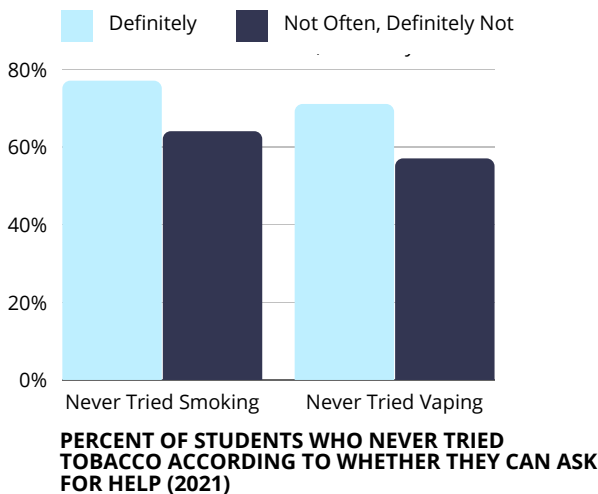


## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Characteristics that lower a person's risk of negative health outcomes or reduce the impact of risk factors on individuals.

### Family Support

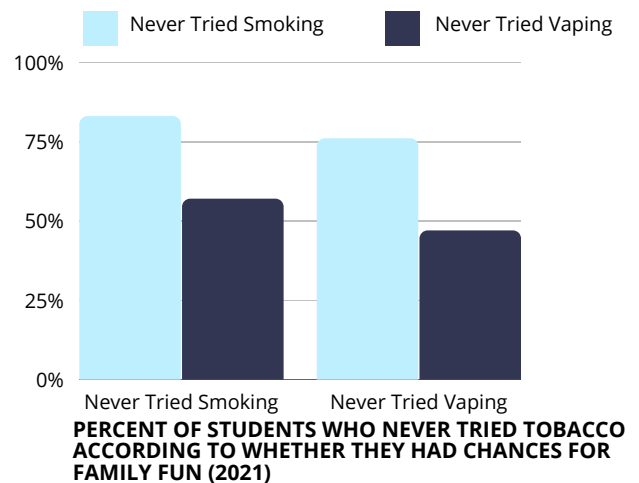
High school students were asked how confident they were that they could rely on their parents for help with personal problems, whether they understood their family's rules, and whether they had lots of opportunities to have fun as a family. **These aspects of family support and guidance were all strong predictors of whether a student tried using tobacco products.**



**54%** of students said they could definitely ask their parents or guardians for help if they had a personal problem, 18% said they definitely couldn't or not often.

**37%** of students said the rules in their family are definitely clear, 11% said their family rules are definitely not clear or not often.

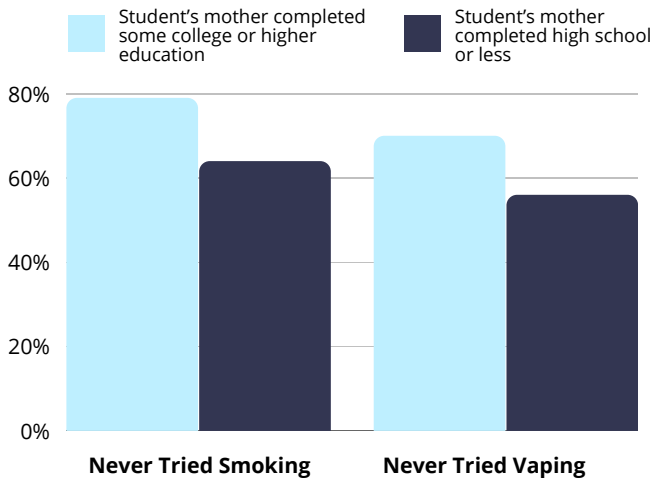
**39%** of students said they definitely have lots of opportunities to have fun with their parents, 23% said they definitely did not or not often.



## Family Economic Stability

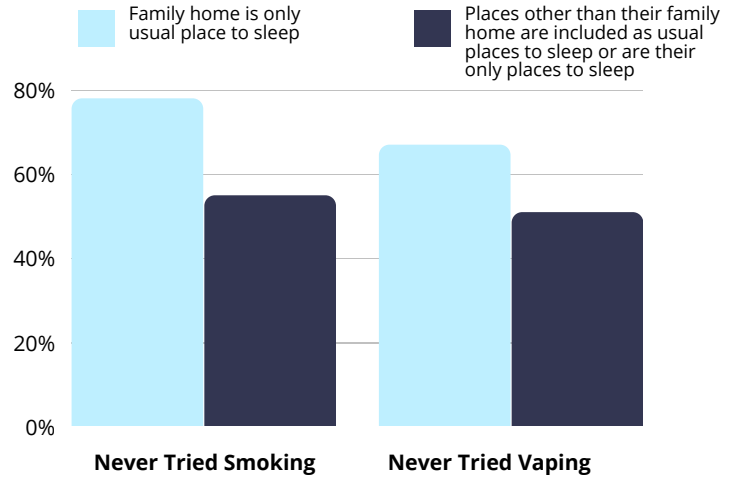
Another protective factor that impacts youth health behaviors is family economic stability. Looking at a student's mother's educational attainment and at a student's usual place to sleep as indicators for stability shows that students who are struggling with stability are more likely to also try tobacco products.

Consider how to target both educational outreach and economic support resources to these families. It might be that these families are sufficiently educated on tobacco-related health outcomes, but they may lack the wherewithal to address it with their children.



**PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO NEVER TRIED TOBACCO ACCORDING TO MOTHER'S EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

Students whose mother completed some college or higher education are less likely to try smoking cigarettes or vaping.



**PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO NEVER TRIED TOBACCO ACCORDING TO STUDENT'S USUAL PLACE TO SLEEP**

93% of students reported that their only usual place to sleep is in their family's home. 5% reported their home as well as another place as their usual places to sleep, and 2% of students only reported places other than their home as their usual places to sleep.

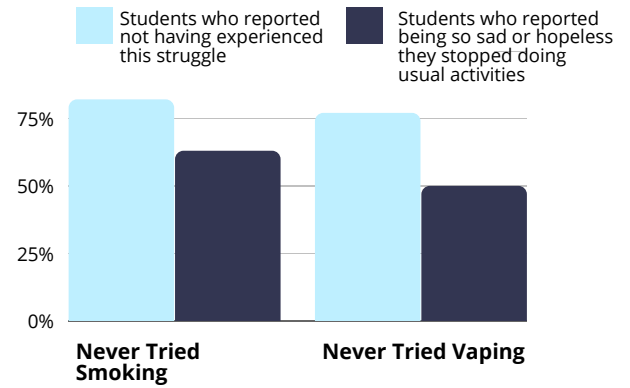


## Mental Health

Mesa County students were asked whether or not they had felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing usual activities. The percentage of students who are experiencing this level of sadness has increased from 2019 to 2021.

Students who reported struggling with mental health are more likely to have also tried using tobacco products. While mental health is a risk factor contributing to substance misuse, nicotine use can also significantly amplify mental illness. Studies have found that nicotine worsens anxiety symptoms and feelings of depression in addition to other mental illnesses.

**43%** of Mesa County students felt so sad or hopeless they stopped doing usual activities.

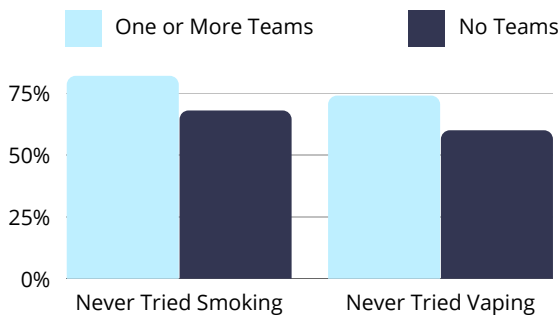


PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO NEVER TRIED TOBACCO ACCORDING TO STUDENT'S MENTAL HEALTH (2021)

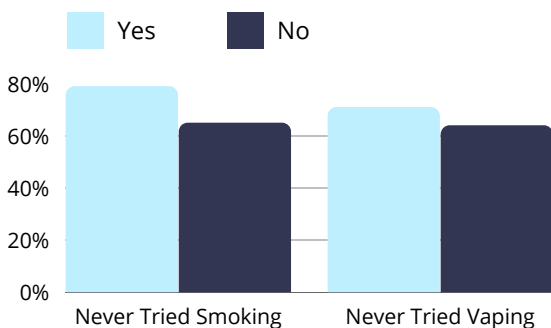
## Social Connection through Extracurricular Activities

Students who participate in groups that foster cooperation and relational growth are more empowered for success and resilience. These relationships and positive connections can act as a protective factor against many negative health behaviors and outcomes.

Students who played on a sports team or participated in extracurricular activities were less likely to try using tobacco products.



PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO NEVER TRIED TOBACCO ACCORDING TO WHETHER STUDENTS PLAYED ON A SPORTS TEAM (2021)

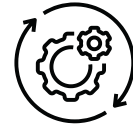


PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO NEVER TRIED TOBACCO ACCORDING TO PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES (2021)

43% of high school students played on 1 or more sports teams during the past 12 months.

55% of high school students participated in extracurricular activities at school such as sports, band, drama, clubs, or student government.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT



- Enhance education around the importance of **the role that strong family engagement and support plays for local youth.**
- Provide education opportunities for adults on how to **start the conversation around tobacco and vaping with youth.**
- Encourage engagement with programs like Grand Valley Connects that **help community members address economic, medical, and behavioral health concerns.**
- Promote and support organizations that host prosocial activities for youth and families. **Explore opportunities to expand their programming and reach.**

# Key Takeaways

Protective factors have a strong impact on tobacco use among youth.

They empower youth for greater success and resilience against many negative health behaviors and outcomes.

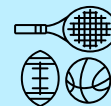
## PROTECTIVE FACTORS



**Strong family support and guidance.**



**Family economic stability.**



**Social connection through extracurricular activities.**

## Tobacco Use among Mesa County Youth Smoking cigarettes and vaping

**Students are 3x more likely to vape than to smoke cigarettes.** This is likely influenced by students' belief that smoking cigarettes is more harmful than vaping. In fact, one of the top three reasons that students gave for vaping is the belief that it is less harmful than other tobacco products.

The rates of students who try tobacco products before age 13 in Mesa County are **nearly double than statewide.**

**Trying tobacco products, both cigarettes and vape, is highly correlated with other substance use.** Students who have tried tobacco are about 2x more likely to try drinking alcohol or to misuse prescription drugs, about 8x more likely to try marijuana, and 10x more likely to try using other drugs, such as cocaine, inhalants, heroin, meth, and ecstasy.

The percentage of high school students who vape was increasing through 2019. **In 2021, usage among students dropped dramatically and may be a result of statewide policy changes.**

## Cessation

**Approximately 1 in 4 women who recently gave birth in Mesa County reported smoking cigarettes prior to their pregnancy.** Half of them reported having stopped smoking cigarettes before the third trimester to protect their babies.

Among students who had used electronic vapor products during the past 12 months, **60% had tried to quit.**

## Secondhand Smoke

**25% of students had recent exposure to secondhand smoke,** either in their home or in a car with their parents.

# Current Tobacco Policy

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**In the state of Colorado tobacco products are subject to a 2.9% sales tax.** There is an additional tax of \$1.94 per pack of 20 cigarettes, non-modified risk nicotine products are taxed at 50%, and modified-risk tobacco products are taxed at 25%.

**Taxes will increase incrementally until July 1, 2027** when cigarettes are taxed at 13.2¢ per cigarette, non-modified risk nicotine products are taxed at 62%, and modified-risk tobacco products are taxed at 31%.

In addition to the Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act, **both Fruita and Grand Junction have smoke and vapor free parks policies** and Grand Junction has a smoke and vapor free transit waiting areas policy.

## Policy Reform

*Tobacco policies enacted around the country and state have been shown to be **an effective way to reduce youth initiation in tobacco use**. This is another focus of local tobacco work, both education on and promotion of policies that are proven to be effective in reducing youth use of vaping and nicotine products.*

**The Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act (CCIAA) is in place in order to protect Coloradans from the dangers associated with second hand smoke and vapor exposure.** The CCIAA prohibits smoking or vaping any substance in any indoor, public area including but not limited to:

- retail and commercial establishments
- restaurants and bars
- hotels and motels
- indoor sports arenas
- reception areas
- common areas of assisted living facilities
- healthcare facilities
- any workplace unless exempted
- public transportation
- Within a 25-foot radius outside the main or front doorways

Schools are protected from tobacco and nicotine use through the **Colorado Tobacco Free Schools law**.

## State Policy Trends

- **Flavored tobacco bans.**
- **Tobacco retail licensing.** A policy that requires tobacco retailers to have a license to sell tobacco products. It aims to reduce illegal sales to young people by ensuring consistent local enforcement of the law and continuing education for retailers.
- **Expanded smoke and vapor-free protections.** These are policies that reduce exposure to secondhand smoke and aerosol emitted by e-cigarettes in public places that are not currently protected by the Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act.



# Community Efforts

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Mesa County Public Health (MCPH) is **actively engaging in efforts to reduce youth tobacco use through education.** This includes a partnership with School District 51 on a vaping campaign focused on providing education to parents on the effects vaping can have on their children.

Additionally, MCPH worked with multiple schools to discuss what resources are available for their students to learn more and assist with cessation resources, policy revisions, what to do if a student is caught with a vape, evidence-based curriculums, and updating signage around schools remains a priority for MCPH when working within school settings.

**Opioid Awareness Weeks in collaboration with Mesa County Opioid Response Group have been a success within schools.** These presentations were recently expanded to include vaping education and resources.



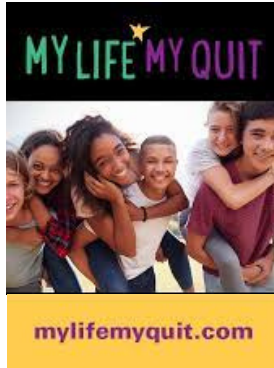
# Resources

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The Quitline™ is a free tobacco cessation program. It has helped more than 1.5 million people quit tobacco.

People have access to professional quit coaches, supportive online community, and nicotine quit medications.



My Life, My Quit™ is a free and confidential program for youth under age 18 to quit smoking or vaping.



Déjelo Ya is another free tobacco cessation program, but all services are offered in Spanish. People have the option to receive support online, by phone or text.

# References

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- [Healthy Kids Colorado Survey \[2015 - 2021\]](#)
- [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System \(BRFSS\) \[2016 - 2021\]](#)
- [Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System \(PRAMS\) \[2018-2021\]](#)
- [CDPHE CoHID \[2016-2021\]](#)
- [Smoking Cessation: A Report of the Surgeon General \[2020\]](#)
- [Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [Tax.colorado.gov](#)
- [Tobacco Free CO](#)





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# **SPECIAL REPORT**

**2023**



**MESA COUNTY  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

## **THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS**

School District 51

MarillacHealth

Warrior Wellness Center at Central High School

Grand Junction Housing Authority

Mesa County Opioid Response Group