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# 'JUULing': The dangerous trend gaining steam among teens

by Kimberly Suiters, WJLA |



As e-cigarettes and vapes help adults quit the tobacco habit, the JUUL is booming in popularity among teenagers. (WJLA)



WASHINGTON (WJLA (<http://wjla.com/features/7-on-your-side/are-your-kids-juuling-at-school-7-on-your-side-investigates>)) - As e-cigarettes and vapes help adults quit the tobacco habit, the JUUL is booming in popularity among teenagers.



## Why?

For starters, teenagers like that it can be hidden in plain sight. It looks like a flash drive and charges by USB. It comes in flavors like crème Brulee, which smells almost as tasty as a caramel macchiato.

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There are several kinds of vapes that look like the JUUL, but this brand alone accounts for half of the e-cigarette market. In 2016, the company saw a 700 percent increase in sales, more than \$322 million. It is marketed as an adult alternative to cigarettes.

Yet, do you know an adult who JUULs?

And yet, teens now use it as a verb.

"We've never seen a trend like this before," McLean High School junior Maria McHugo said. "It's so prevalent in the student body that only a third haven't participated in JUULing.

You're supposed to be 18 to buy a JUUL. The company requires you to be 21 if you buy it online. But WJLA found that kids in Arlington, Va. as young as 12 know what it is, and claim that their middle school friends "hit the JUUL" from time to time.

McHugo first learned about JUULing last year from a young relative in middle school in another state. She said a boy ran for class president and exclaimed, "If I'm president, everyone will be allowed to JUUL in the bathrooms!" He won.

When McHugo and her classmate Nick Monroy polled their classmates for a cover story for their monthly magazine, The Highlander, two-thirds of the students polled admitted to JUULing. One-fifth confessed to doing it every day.

Students from Bishop O'Connell High School and Yorktown High School in Arlington both said, anecdotally, those numbers match usage at their schools too.

"It's in the bathrooms all the time," said one O'Connell junior, enjoying her iced chai beverage with a girlfriend after school last month.

When two sophomore girls from Yorktown were shown a JUUL and asked if they knew what it was, they responded, "I don't know" and "A flash drive?"

A few minutes later they admitted, they lied. They knew it was a JUUL but didn't want to get in trouble.

Not only is the JUUL easy to hide in your hand, or disguised as a flash drive on your laptop, the high is impossible to spot.

"With JUULs, it's a five-minute buzz that keeps you entertained in class – your eyes aren't red, your speech isn't slurred, it doesn't smell bad," said Monroy, in an interview approved by his principal, Dr. Ellen Reilly. "Students are seeing how easy it is to use JUULs in school. They think, 'If I can get away with a JUUL, who's to say I can't get away with using a dab pen, and liquid THC, a prolonged high.' The JUUL is a gateway to people thinking they can get away with more. They've been given an inch, and because faculty doesn't know what it is, now they're taking a mile."

Just this month, **the US Army warned about the dangers of synthetic marijuana**

(<https://www.circa.com/story/2018/02/01/nation/army-vaping-oils-blamed-for-2-deaths-60-hospitalizations>)  
vaping oils after dozens of soldiers were hospitalized.

We don't know all of the ingredients in a JUUL, or what the health effects of inhaling the vapors are because it isn't regulated by the government yet. We do know, the nicotine in one JUUL pod is the equivalent of a pack of cigarettes. The kids have a name for the quick, sometimes too powerful buzz: nic sick.

School administrators and parents are catching up. In January, the McLean PTSA held its best-attended meeting in two years. It allowed 7 On Your Side to attend, in the spirit of educating the community about the practice.

"Here on my computer, this USB drive is not a USB, it's the charger for the JUUL," demonstrated one Fairfax County Police Officer.

Fairfax Police report interventions at school for vaping have already doubled last year's total.

"I warned one student that it will cost him and his family a lot if they get fined for this," said the officer. "He said, 'But I don't vape. I JUUL.' They don't know that it's the same thing. Somehow they think JUULing is safer."

McLean's Student Resource Officer, Scott Davis, demonstrated how easy it is for the kids to JUUL in school. "Back of the class, they blow it on the floor, and it's gone." Or, smokers will "ghost it," meaning swallow the smoke so it disappears.

Principal Reilly has no doubt that teenagers are the target of this product.

"These are slim devices, you plug in, it lights up. It comes in different flavors a teenager would like. It's being geared to our kids," said Reilly.

The Food and Drug Administration did make it illegal to sell vapes and e-cigarettes to kids under 18, but it also moved a compliance deadline for new products from 2018 to 2022 to foster "innovation" for "forms of nicotine delivery" that are potentially "less harmful" than cigarettes.

In a recent speech, FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb said, "We will redouble our efforts to protect kids from all nicotine-containing products."

The president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids shakes his head.

"This is the classic case of the government dropping the ball," Matt Myers said.

Myers wants the FDA to regulate these products now so we know what's in a JUUL and what's being done so it doesn't appeal to kids.

"It is so sleek, so clean looking, it misleads about risk," said Myers. "It doesn't look harmful, even while delivering nicotine rapidly to the youthful brain. And we know the delivery of nicotine causes addiction and impacts the developing brain."

Kids and parents assume that JUULing is safer than smoking cigarettes. In December, the American Academy of Pediatrics warned consumers about the dangers of nicotine.

The JUUL Labs website gives testimonials from adults only, asks you to verify that you are 21 before entering its site, and markets itself as "the alternative for adult smokers." But in the social media age, a product that catches fire with kids doesn't have to market, in the traditional sense, to anyone. Search "JUULing" on Instagram or YouTube, and a stream of photos and videos of teens doing "cool" smoke tricks pops up.

"When there is government oversight, the developers have to prove its sale and marketing is appropriate for the protection of the public health," said Myers. "That means, we are not addicting kids across the country with a new nicotine product. I believe we are."

JUUL Labs declined an interview with WJLA, but their media spokesperson gave a two-page statement about their opposition to the use of their product by minors. They also answered our questions directly in the statement below:

## Statement

***JUUL Labs' mission is to eliminate cigarettes by offering existing adult smokers a true alternative to combustible cigarettes. There is no substitute for complete cessation for smokers. Public health experts agree the best option is not to use nicotine products. JUUL, however, offers an alternative for the 40 million existing adult smokers in the U.S. Our research shows that JUUL has helped over half a million adult smokers to displace cigarettes, and we are working to enable millions more to switch through our technological innovations.***

***We strongly oppose and actively discourage the use of our product by minors, and it is in fact illegal to sell our product to minors. No minor should be in the possession of a JUUL product. We are committed to reducing the number of minors who possess or use tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, and to find ways to keep young people from ever trying these products. That's why we raised the age of purchasing JUUL on our website to age 21. To further combat underage use, JUUL Labs is focused on education, enforcement, and partnership with others who are working on this issue, including lawmakers, educators and our business partners. Specifically, we are:***

***• Evaluating technological innovations intended to address underage use.***

***• Launching educational pilot programs in high schools in California.***

***• Actively working with law enforcement and community leaders across the country.***

***• Deploying a secret shopper program to monitor age verification of retailers.***

***Nicotine is addictive. An individual who has not previously used nicotine products should not start, particularly youth. Recent science raises serious concerns about the adverse effect of nicotine on adolescent neurodevelopment. We are committed to increasing the dialogue around the dangers of nicotine use in adolescents. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate and engage with parents and educators and encourage them to email us at [youthprevention@juullabs.com](mailto:youthprevention@juullabs.com).***

## Responses to Questions

- Recent stats show “juuling” accounts for nearly 50% of the e-cigarette market. Why is your product so popular?

JUUL Labs' mission is to eliminate cigarettes by offering existing adult smokers a true alternative to combustible cigarettes. JUUL offers an alternative for the 40 million existing adult smokers in the U.S. Many current adult smokers are looking for an alternative to cigarettes, and JUUL is the number one vapor product in the U.S. for adult smokers. We built a product intended to meet their standards, and at the same time provide them with a totally unique experience, from design to flavor.

- It appears on your website that you market to adults exclusively, yet it seems, anecdotally, that teenagers are the primary users of a JUUL. What does your research tell you about how many teens (under 18) are “juulling?”

JUUL currently is highly limited in its marketing efforts. We market our products responsibly and follows strict guidelines so that material is exclusively directed towards adult smokers and never to youth audiences.

JUUL's mission is to eliminate cigarette smoking by offering existing adult smokers with a true alternative to combustible cigarettes. JUUL is not intended for anyone else. We strongly oppose and actively discourage the use

of our product by minors, and it is, in fact, illegal to sell our product to minors. No minor should be in the possession of a JUUL product.

- Teens tell us they like the design of a JUUL because they can hide it in plain sight from adults. Why did you decide to create a JUUL that looks like a USB thumb drive?

Being smokers for many years and while graduate students in the Stanford design program, James Monsees and Adam Bowen co-founded JUUL Labs in 2007 to provide the world's one billion smokers with an alternative to combustible tobacco products. Based on their research, James and Adam learned that smokers who want to switch are looking for something that does not look or feel like a cigarette. That's why they created JUUL to not look like a cigarette.

- Medical research found that e-cigarette vapor can contain cancer-causing formaldehyde. Can you assure customers that JUUL pods and vapor don't produce formaldehyde chemical compounds?

JUUL uses a temperature regulation system to heat nicotine-based liquid to a level that is designed to avoid burning and minimize the degradation reactions that occur during combustion. JUUL intentionally does not have any user-modifiable settings in order to ensure consistent output, including ensuring that the liquid is not burned. We have conducted testing of our product that is planned for presentation at an upcoming scientific conference, and we look forward to sharing the results within the scientific community.

- What other chemicals are found in juul pods and vapor? Do you believe your product is a safer alternative to cigarettes, and what medical proof do you have to back that claim?

We are careful to avoid promoting JUUL as safer than combustible tobacco products or other ENDS, in compliance with federal laws that prohibit us from doing



so before JUUL is approved as a Modified Risk Tobacco Product. But we strongly believe in the promise of JUUL to provide an alternative to cigarettes that reduces the harm caused by combustible tobacco products.

The best decision is not to use tobacco products or to quit smoking all together. However, JUUL offers an alternative for adult smokers who want to switch. We utilize a thorough screening process to ensure the ingredients in JUUL's formulation and flavorants – with the exception of nicotine – are not included on government agency lists, including the Harmful and Potentially Harmful Constituents as outlined by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Many scientists are studying the longer term impact of using vapor products. According to a robust and growing body of evidence, switching to e-cigarettes may significantly reduce exposure to toxins associated with combustion. For example, several randomized clinical studies of vapor products reported large, rapid and sustained reductions, within days, of circulating levels of multiple categories of chemicals of concern.

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