

2019 PROFILE: NICOTINE (INCLUDING VAPING) IN SOUTHWEST CONNECTICUT

Smoking is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Tobacco products, whether smoked (like cigarettes or cigars) or smokeless (like chew), contain various pollutants, particularly nicotine, which is highly addictive. Nicotine is a harmful substance that affects the cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal and immune systems and most body organs. Nicotine is now also delivered through vapes—also known as e-cigarettes, pens, and by the popular brand name JUULs. All these products are regulated by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) under the regulatory category of “tobacco.”

Vapes are battery-operated devices that can resemble a flash drive, pen, or cigarette. Vapes allow the user to inhale aerosol that contains the same harsh chemicals that are in cigarettes (such as acetone and formaldehyde), along with additional chemicals and flavoring. Vapes are popular with teens and young adults and are frequently used to ingest marijuana or THC (the main active ingredient in marijuana). Recent national data suggest that the popularity of vaping is leading to an increase in cigarette smoking, reversing a decades-long drop. Teens who use vapes are 4 times more likely to smoke cigarettes.

Magnitude of Issue:

Tobacco: The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reports that Southwest Connecticut (SW CT) has greater awareness of the risks of cigarette smoking, lower use of tobacco, and lower use of cigarettes compared to the state and country. (See Figure below.)

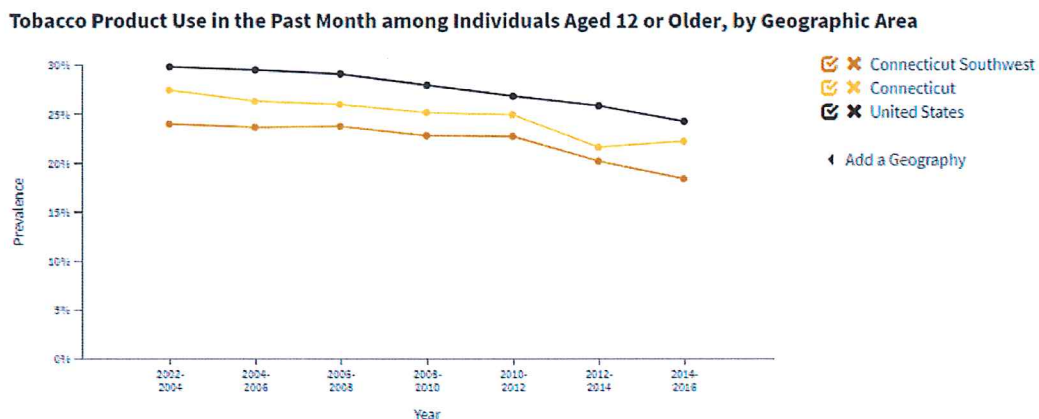


Figure 4: Tobacco Product Use in US, CT and SW CT Over Time

Source: NSDUH

- The current prevalence of tobacco use among adults ranges from 7% in the Greenwich area to 21% in Greater Bridgeport, according to 2018 DataHaven surveys.
- Although NSDUH data show that tobacco usage in SW CT decreased 6 points between 2002-04 and 2014-16, the more recent DataHaven surveys found that smoking had increased 3 points between 2015 and 2018 in Greater Bridgeport.



Vaping: Similar to national and state trends, vaping is increasing dramatically in SW CT:

- 14% to 23% of adults in the region have ever tried vaping, compared with 11% to 18% three years ago. 36% of Hispanic/Latino adults in SW CT tried vaping compared with 22% of Caucasians and 21% of African Americans, according to DataHaven.
- The vaping prevalence is highest amongst teens, though data are not available for all communities. In a 2017 youth survey in a local suburb, 25% of freshmen and sophomores and 45% of juniors and seniors reported vaping during the past month.
- A youth survey in a local city found that 12% of high school students had vaped marijuana in the past month.
- 2018-2019 youth surveys in the region found that teens perceive vapes to be far less harmful than cigarettes.

Risk Factors and Subpopulations at Risk:

- *Risk factors:* lower levels of education, lower socioeconomic status, males.
- *At risk populations:* Adults with mental health or substance use disorders, who account for 40% of all cigarettes smoked; adults seeking to quit smoking cigarettes; youth.

Burden:

Smoking creates a burden on individual health as well as societal healthcare costs:

- On average, smokers die 10 years earlier than nonsmokers. Second-hand smoke is a health risk present not only in traditionally cigarettes but also in vapes, due to the chemical and nicotine content.
- Smoking among people with serious mental illness is a major contributor to their premature mortality.
- In CT, 4900 adults die each year from smoking-related causes.
- In CT, smoking accounts for \$2.03 Billion in annual healthcare costs, as well as \$1.25 Billion in productivity loss.
- Schools in SW CT reported 384 disciplinary actions related to vaping in 2017-2018.

Capacity and Service System Strengths:

Prevention: Tobacco control efforts are largely conducted through Local Prevention Councils, municipal health departments, and school systems, with unequal levels of investment that depend on local community resources and grants. Local communities are all addressing vaping as a growing epidemic; for example, Stamford has created a vaping task force and Trumbull has conducted a vaping education campaign. The Norwalk-based Courage to Speak Foundation is incorporating vaping education into its 2019 school substance abuse curriculum.

Treatment & Recovery: Some behavioral health providers have focused on reducing smoking and increasing healthy behaviors. Several years ago Bridge House in Bridgeport was the first psychosocial program in the state to go smoke-free. The local hospitals in Bridgeport, Greenwich, Norwalk and Stamford offer smoking cessation programs. In Bridgeport, St. Vincent's Medical Center runs a vaping cessation program for teens, and in Norwalk, the local SMART Recovery teen group addresses vaping on a regular basis, including encouraging alternatives. SmokefreeTXT and BecomeAnEx.org are apps designed specifically to assist teens with quitting.

Legislation & Enforcement: Bridgeport and Trumbull passed local ordinances that raise the age to buy nicotine products (including vapes) from 18 to 21 years of age even prior to the "Tobacco 21" bill being passed at the state level during the 2019 legislative session. To ensure compliance with tobacco legislation, 661 compliance checks were conducted in SW CT during 2018-19; FDA data show that 12% of those retailers received a warning letter and 1% paid a fine for the violations that were found. 4 suburbs in SW CT had no violations.

