

Why has the decline in smoking among Irish teenagers stopped?

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As reported previously¹, in Ireland, teen smoking decreased from 41% in 1995 to 13.1% in 2015. But, in 2019, current smoking increased overall to 14.4% from 13.1% in 2015, with the prevalence in 2019 being greater in boys than girls (16.2%) vs (12.8%). This is a serious threat to Ireland's tobacco endgame.

We used data from 1,493 (2015 wave) and 1,949 students (2019 wave) of ESPAD Ireland (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs) to analyse the use of tobacco products by teenagers and offer an explanation for the increase. Adjusted incidence risk ratios (IRR) for current smoking were estimated using a Poisson regression analysis.

The increase in current cigarette smoking in 16-year-olds in Ireland between 2015 and 2019 was associated with an increasing use of e-cigarettes as well as with having peers who smoke. Lack of parental regulation increased the odds of smoking.

Our findings highlight the negative impact that increased youth e-cigarette use has had on current teenage cigarette smoking. We recommend extending tobacco control legislation regarding minors to include e-cigarettes. This may be desirable to prevent exposure to secondhand aerosol (SHA) but also because of the possible renormalisation of smoking.

Conflict of Interest: None to declare

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¹ Sunday S, Hanafin J, Clancy L. Increased smoking and e-cigarette use among Irish teenagers: A new threat to Tobacco Free Ireland 2025. ERJ Open Res 2021; (<https://doi.org/10.1183/23120541.00438-2021>).

Table 1: Sample Characteristics, and Poisson regression results (Adjusted Incidence Risk Ratios - IRR) of factors associated with current smoking in 16-year-olds, based on data from the Irish 2015 & 2019 ESPAD Surveys

	Sample Characteristics		Poisson Regression Results Current smoking (16-year-olds)		
	2015 n (%)	2019 n (%)	Total Adjusted IRR (95% CI)	Male Adjusted IRR (95% CI)	Female Adjusted IRR (95% CI)
<i>Year</i>					
2015	1493	---	1	1	1
2019	---	1949	0.91 (0.85, 0.98)*	0.91 (0.82, 1.00)	0.95 (0.86, 1.05)
<i>Gender</i>					
Male	752 (51.1)	946 (48.5)	1		
Female	720 (48.9)	1003 (51.4)	1.00 (0.93, 1.07)	N/A	N/A
<i>Ever-used e-cigarettes</i>					
No	1088 (77.0)	1219 (62.7)*	1	1	1
Yes	325 (23.0)	723 (37.2)	1.27 (1.16, 1.40)*	1.33 (1.17, 1.51)*	1.27 (1.11, 1.45)*
<i>Current e-cigarette use</i>					
No	1270 (89.9)	918 (84.5)*	1	1	1
Yes	143 (10.1)	351 (18.1)	1.45 (1.31, 1.61)*	1.39 (1.21, 1.60)*	1.49 (1.26, 1.75)*
<i>Household composition</i>					
Single parent	262 (17.8)	371 (19.0) *	1	1	1
Two parents	1109 (75.3)	1490 (76.4)	0.90 (0.83, 0.98)*	0.88 (0.78, 0.99)*	0.93 (0.82, 1.05)
Blended family	101 (6.9)	88 (4.5)	0.84 (0.71, 0.99)*	0.87 (0.68, 1.11)	0.81 (0.64, 1.03)
<i>Parental Regulation</i>					
Know always	906 (62.7)	1194 (63.2)	1	1	1
Know quite often	337 (23.3)	455 (24.1)	0.97 (0.89, 1.06)	0.97 (0.86, 1.09)	0.97 (0.86, 1.10)
Know sometimes	128 (8.9)	166 (8.8)	1.16 (1.04, 1.30)*	1.15 (0.98, 1.34)	1.16 (0.98, 1.38)
Usually don't know	73 (5.1)	74 (3.9)	1.25 (1.07, 1.45)*	1.28 (1.06, 1.53)*	1.23 (0.92, 1.63)
<i>Peer smoking</i>					
None	478 (33.4)	558 (29.8)	1	1	1
A few/some	802 (56.1)	1125 (60.1)	1.00 (0.92, 1.08)	0.99 (0.89, 1.11)	1.01 (0.90, 1.13)
Most/all	150 (10.5)	188 (10.1)	1.20 (1.06, 1.35)*	1.08 (0.92, 1.28)	1.33 (1.13, 1.57)*

* Statistical significance at $p < .05$

