

# Surveillance of Vape Retailers in Barkhamsted, New Hartford, and Winchester

## WHAT WE DID

In June 2021, the Winchester Youth Service Bureau conducted a surveillance of 12 registered vape retailers in three communities. Most of the locations were visited in 2019 as well; some stores were under new ownership.

There were several areas that were assessed during the visits including the existence of signage around Tobacco 21 and 'We Card Under 21', if the retailer displays their license, the type and amount of advertising found on store windows, the types of vaping products sold, and location of vape products within the store.

Owners and clerks were also asked about the bestselling brands at the shop, the general age of the consumers, and their own knowledge around the dangers of vaping.

## WHAT WE FOUND

- Of the **12** retailers that were visited **1** was in Barkhamsted, **2** in New Hartford, and **9** in Winchester.
- **6** retailers did not display a license to sell. One retailer did not have a license to sell.
- Only **1** retailer did not display any We Card Under 21 signage. **1** retailer's display was outdated with Under 18 signage.
- **5** retailers had advertisements for vaping products on store windows.
- In **3** stores the vaping products were displayed behind glass next to the candy. In another store they were displayed directly next to the candy (no glass.)
- Store owners and clerks identified their best-selling products as JUUL, Airis, and Leap Go. There was a common perception that the 'younger crowd' preferred JUUL Menthol and any fruity flavors.

## YOUTH MARKETING

*"Fruit flavors sell like hotcakes."*

*Although JUUL discontinued selling fruit flavors in 2019, there are still numerous replacements available. In this region popular brands include Airis Puff and LEAP GO which are available in over 15 kid-friendly flavors including Grape, Blue Razz, Pink Lemonade, Gummy Bear and Sour Apple.*

*"Young people like JUULS menthol and fruity flavors best."*



## What is the current PERCEPTION OF HARM?

**ELEVEN** of the owners & clerks we spoke with were aware of the dangers associated with vaping. “It is terrible for you. I would not do it, but it is a money maker and so I have to sell it.”

- **SIX** owner/clerks indicated that they believed vaping was a better alternative to smoking traditional cigarettes.
- **TWO** owner/clerks felt that vaping might be worse than smoking, “you can puff it anywhere thus increasing the intake of carcinogens and nicotine.”

## What about ACCESS & ENFORCEMENT?

Youth who live in this region told us that purchasing vapes is not difficult even if you are underage. Several youth informed us that after the Tobacco 21 law was enacted in October 2019, stores sell to 18, 19 and 20-year-olds. Several teens also told us that they commonly purchase vapes from older youth. “Older kids, over 21, buy them and hand them to younger kids right outside my door.”

There are at least three locations in this region that are known to sell to underage youth. According to one store owner “Vapes make great money! It is not my job to verify whether the license is legitimate.”

## NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Continue to educate youth, parents and caregivers on the dangers of vaping for our youth.
- ✓ Promote the Tobacco 21 law that took effect in October 2019.
- ✓ Conduct compliance checks utilizing local youth. Follow up with all retailers that fail and offer any support or training that may be required.
- ✓ Highlight & promote all retailers that pass compliance.
- ✓ Continue to conduct an annual environmental scan and determine current needs in the community.

## PARENTS ARE PROVIDING VAPES

*“Parents buy these for their kids all the time. Not my business.”*

During our surveillance a parent entered the store while on Facetime with her child. The youth was ‘directing’ the mom to the counter to get the correct bubblegum flavored disposable vape that she wanted.

Storeowners felt that the responsibility of keeping vapes out of the hands of youth was a parental responsibility and lamented the lack of parental education and care.

