



healthwatch
East Sussex

Children and Young People's views and experiences of Nicotine Pouches

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CYP Experiences of Nicotine Pouches

In 2025, Healthwatch East Sussex began research on nicotine products and the impact they may have on people of different ages.

We found little information about what nicotine pouches are, how they are used and minimal insight on how they may impact people's wellbeing.

Nicotine pouches are slim, soft packets filled with nicotine, flavourings, and plant-based material placed under the lip that release nicotine. These differ from nicotine patches, which are placed on the arm.

Having identified such limited information on nicotine pouches, we decided to undertake our own project to hear children and young people's (CYP) views, and their experiences of using them.

What did we do?

We first undertook some initial factfinding engagement at three colleges in East Sussex, to explore young people's awareness of different nicotine products.

We then visited colleges in Lewes, Hastings and Bexhill to speak to young people about their experiences and hosted a short online poll to ensure young people from across East Sussex had the opportunity to share their views with us.

What were our aims?

- To gather young people's (under 22) views and understanding of nicotine pouches
- To better understand how and why young people choose to use nicotine pouches
- To understand if young people have experienced any health impacts from using nicotine pouches



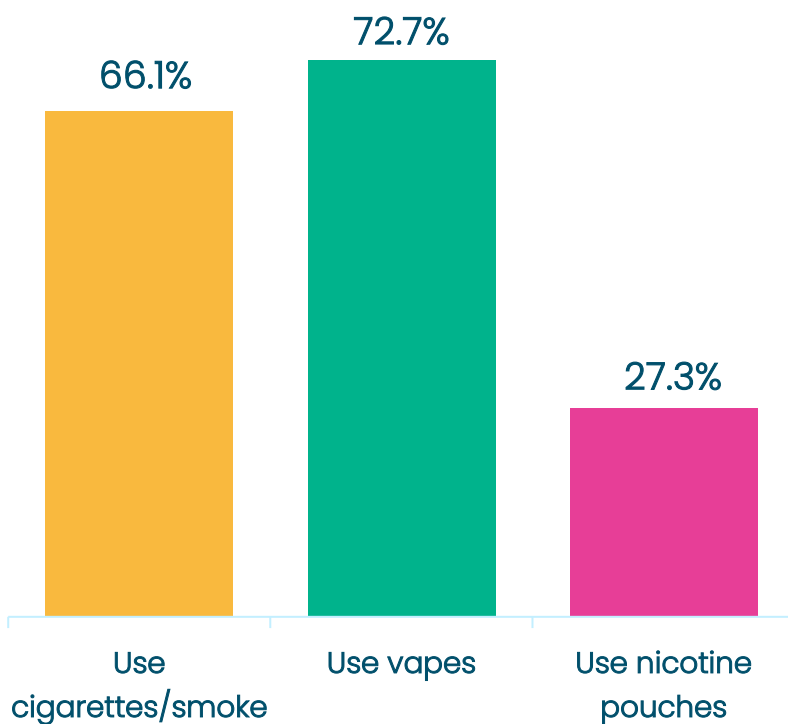
Initial Findings

In September 2025, as part of our initial factfinding activity, we visited colleges in Eastbourne, Hastings and Lewes to find out about young people's views and awareness of different products which can contain nicotine.

As well as speaking to them about their experiences, young people were asked to add to our sticker chart to indicate if they knew anyone who:

- Smoked
- Vaped
- Used nicotine pouches

Young people were asked to put a maximum of one sticker in each column, regardless of how many people they knew who used that product.

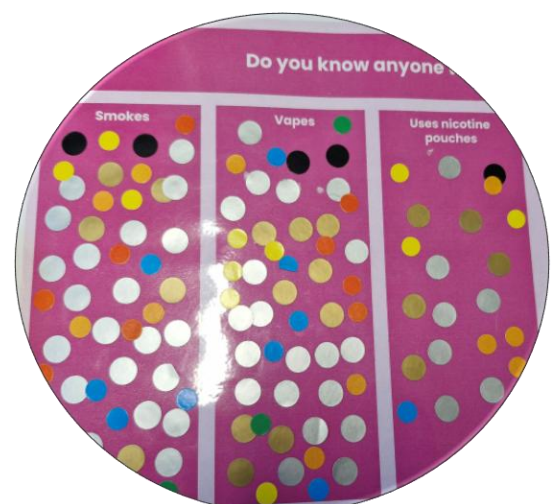


In total, **165** people completed our sticker chart. More than two thirds of the young people we heard from knew someone who used vapes (72.7%). 66.1% knew someone who smoked and 27.3% knew someone who used nicotine pouches.

Many of those we spoke to knew people who used multiple or in some cases all the products we asked about.

Some young people shared details about who they knew that used these products.

The most common response was friends or parents/carers. Some young people also shared they themselves used these products, including those aged under 18.

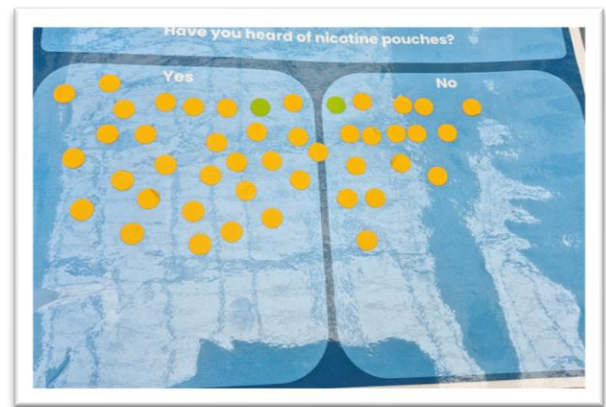
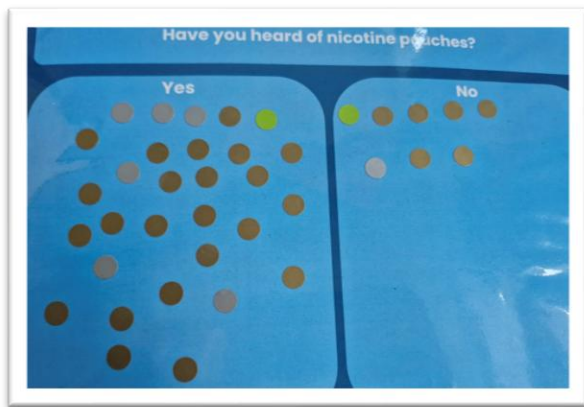


Awareness and Access

In 2026, we undertook further engagement to understand young people's experiences and views on nicotine pouches, undertaking an online poll and further in-person engagement at colleges in East Sussex.

In total, **130** young people shared their views and experiences with us.

Of the young people we spoke to, **78.5%** (102) had heard of nicotine pouches before. Many of them referred to nicotine pouches by a range of different names, with the most common being "snus" and particular brand names.



Sticker charts from two of our college visits

Most commonly they heard about nicotine pouches via social media (people talking about the product and seeing advertisements on social media) and via displays and advertisements in local corner shops.

Young people shared that they felt most corner shops often "have a wall" displaying a variety of different nicotine pouches.

Some shared concerns around how nicotine pouches are promoted to their age group, giving examples of social media influencers promoting these products, and of free samples being handed out at events such as festivals.

Some young people disclosed they use nicotine pouches, with many of these being under the age of 18.

They also shared they buy nicotine pouches themselves from corner shops, supermarkets, or vape shops, or have been given these by friends.

Understanding, Impact and Availability of Information

Understanding

- Young people had a mixed understanding of what nicotine pouches were. Some mistook these for nicotine replacement patches which are placed on the arm. Others did not recognise the name nicotine pouches but were aware of the product when referred to as “snus” or a brand name.
- Some felt nicotine pouches could be used as a tool to help people to stop smoking or vaping, with some sharing friends or family members had used pouches in this way.
- Some young people shared they had been taught about nicotine pouches and other nicotine products as part of PHSE lessons at school or college.
- Opinions on whether nicotine pouches were better or worse for you than smoking and/or vaping were mixed. Some young people felt nicotine pouches were better for you as you didn’t have to inhale anything. Others believed nicotine pouches were stronger in nicotine than smoking or vaping and so felt pouches may be worse.
- Some of these young people shared that nicotine pouches may be worse because they are easier to use (as they don’t produce any smoke/vapor) meaning people may use them more regularly.

Impact on individuals

Young people who used nicotine pouches shared a variety of experiences of using these products:

- Some enjoyed how nicotine pouches made them feel, sharing they didn’t think they had experienced any negative impacts from using nicotine pouches.
- Other young people had experienced physical or mental health symptoms (such as nausea, gum problems and depression) they felt were related to using nicotine pouches.
- Three young people shared that they had tried nicotine pouches in the past, but became very ill after using them and have not used them since.

Understanding, Impact and Availability of Information

Impact on individuals (continued)

- Many young people who had used nicotine pouches shared they also smoke cigarettes and/or use vapes.
- Some had tried to stop using nicotine products (including nicotine pouches, cigarettes and vapes) but hadn't been able to. One person shared they had spoken to their GP but hadn't received any support or referral to another service.
- Some young people raised concerns their friends were addicted to nicotine pouches because of how often they used these products.
- One person shared their friend smokes, vapes and uses nicotine pouches, including using nicotine pouches whilst they are vaping.

Availability of information

The young people we spoke to told us that to find out about nicotine pouches and any potential impacts they would:

- go online (websites, social media, artificial intelligence)
- talk to their friends to find out their views
- read product packaging.

Through our own searches we were able to find information about what nicotine pouches are and how they are used, but found limited information about how nicotine pouches may impact an individual's health and wellbeing.

We were also unable to find any services that could support people who wanted to stop or reduce using nicotine pouches, including those supporting people to stop smoking.



What we heard: Quotes

"Pouches are handed out at festivals, but its not very good because it promotes them"

"I think some of my friends are addicted"

"There's a wall of them [tins of nicotine pouches] at the corner shop"

"I don't use them. I heard they can burn a hole through your lip"

"I heard about them [nicotine pouches] from the news"

"I see them [nicotine pouches] a lot on social media"

Key Learnings and Next Steps

Key Learning

- Young people's understanding of what nicotine pouches are varies.
- Although the amount of young people smoking and vaping is potentially higher, young people are using nicotine pouches, with some young people using nicotine pouches alongside cigarettes and/or vapes.
- Some young people have experienced negative effects after using nicotine pouches.
- Robust and objective information is not available on the potential health and wellbeing effects of using nicotine pouches.
- No NHS or alternative support mechanisms seem to exist for anyone seeking support to stop using nicotine pouches.

Next Steps

1. Healthwatch East Sussex will share our findings with East Sussex County Council, Public Health, NHS Surrey and Sussex and other local partners to raise awareness of young people's use and experiences of nicotine pouches.
2. Healthwatch East Sussex will continue to work with and build on our relationships with local colleges and schools to ensure we continue to hear the views and experiences of local young people.
3. Healthwatch East Sussex will continue to monitor local and national information about nicotine pouches and when relevant share this with our community to increase awareness.
4. Healthwatch East Sussex will continue our work to hear about people's views and experiences of nicotine pouches, and will host a Sussex-wide survey around this topic for all age groups in the summer of 2026.



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