



Nicotine Product Harm Perception Report 2026



NICOKICK



NORTHERNER

Introduction

The United States has made significant progress in reducing smoking rates over the past two decades. The adult smoking rate declined from 20.9% in 2005 to approximately 9.9% in 2024, representing millions of Americans moving away from combustible tobacco. Despite this progress, smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S., claiming more than 480,000 lives annually.

Accurate information about the relative risks of different nicotine products is a part of the public discussion around smoking and nicotine use. A substantial body of scientific literature, including systematic reviews and meta-analyses, has examined how different nicotine-product categories compare in terms of harmful constituents and risk.¹ This report focuses on how adult respondents perceive those differences.

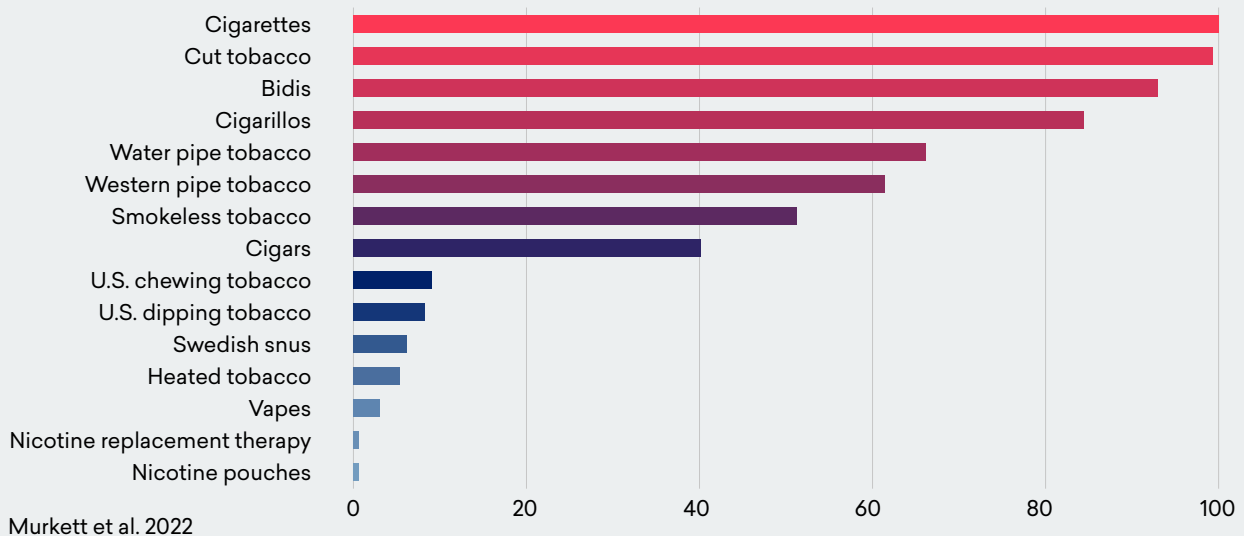
This survey, commissioned by Haypp Group, parent company of Nicokick.com and Northerner.com, indicates that many adult consumers report beliefs about nicotine products and nicotine itself that may not align with current science-backed evidence around nicotine and product risk.

Misperceptions about nicotine products persist. The survey findings suggest that some adults perceive combustible and non-combustible products as carrying similar risks. These results may be relevant to how adult tobacco and nicotine users understand product categories and relative harm. This report presents survey findings and context from public sources on reported perceptions. It does not promote any specific product or assess behavior, causation, or clinical outcomes.

This study examines how adults in the U.S. perceive the risks of smoking, nicotine, and certain alternative nicotine products. Based on a survey of 1,973 adults, it reports respondents' views on relative harm and sources of information.

Published Risk Continuum for Selected Nicotine Products

Relative risk estimates of 15 nicotine products



Murkett et al. 2022

¹ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, "The Relative Risks of Tobacco Products", content current as of April 23, 2026

Key Facts and Figures at a Glance

Is Smoking Back in Fashion?

- 16.6% agree smoking is back in fashion
- 36.3% of 25–34 year-olds agree

Misperception of Product Risk Level

- 60.6% believe nicotine pouches are as harmful as or more harmful than cigarettes
- 73% believe vaping is as harmful as or more harmful than smoking
- 39% believe nicotine gum is as or more harmful than cigarettes

Knowledge About Nicotine

- 64.9% believe nicotine causes cancer
- 45.7% believe nicotine is the most harmful part of a cigarette
- 71.2% believe nicotine pouches and snus cause oral cancer
- 52.1% believe vaping exposes users to more chemicals than smoking

The “Vaping Epidemic” Framing

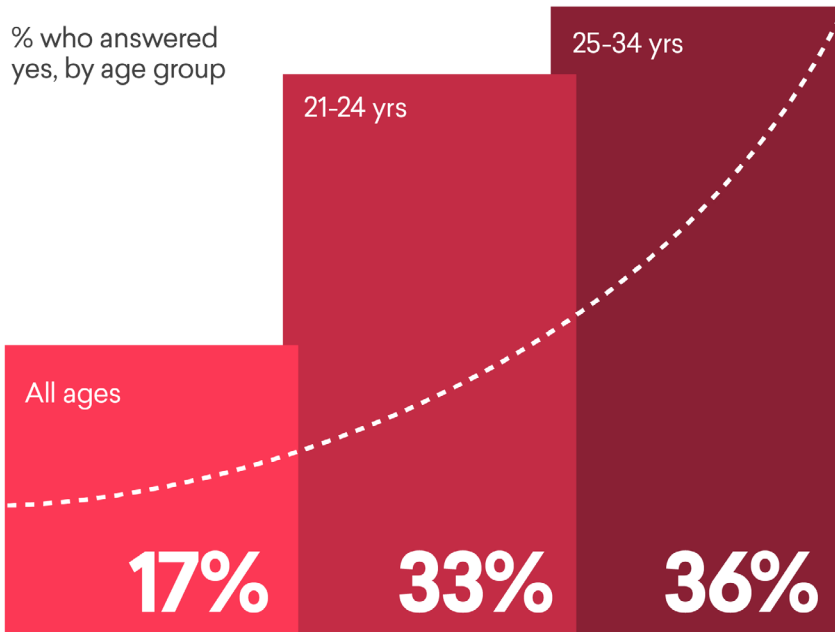
- 70.5% believe there is a vaping epidemic in the U.S.
- 72% believe vaping is mostly popular with youth

Information and Knowledge Gaps

- 68.9% feel informed about nicotine risks, yet many respondents showed important knowledge gaps
- 36% get their information from news media

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

Is smoking back in fashion?



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

01. Smoking Visibility and Cultural Perceptions

From so-called “cigfluencers” on social media to high-profile figures photographed smoking at public events, cigarettes appear to have renewed visibility in some cultural settings. The survey results suggest that this visibility is not perceived equally across age groups. Younger adult respondents were more likely than older respondents to view smoking as fashionable, visible, or socially appealing.

These responses should not be interpreted as evidence of a population-level increase in smoking. They describe attitudes and perceptions only. Still, the age differences are notable.

Overall, 16.6% of respondents agree that smoking is “back in fashion,” while 24.6% are neutral and 58.8% disagree. What is notable is the stark generational divide.

Agreement rises to 36.3% among 25–34 year-olds and 32.6% among 21–24 year-olds, compared with 7.9% among those 55 and older. Men were more likely than women to agree, at 20.5% compared to 13.4%. Taken together, these results suggest that perceptions of smoking’s renewed cultural visibility are strongest among younger adults and more common among men.

A similar pattern appeared in responses about smoking imagery. Overall, 23.6% of all respondents said there are more photos of celebrities or influencers smoking than in previous years. That figure rose to 39.1% among 25–34 year-olds and 27.9% among 21–24 year-olds. These results suggest that younger adults are more likely to perceive smoking as culturally visible, even as smoking in those age groups continues to decline.

“Smoking is Cool”: The Generational Divide

Responses to the statement “smoking is cool” vary substantially by age and gender. Overall, 11.6% of respondents agreed, but agreement rose to 30.2% among 21–24 year-olds and 25.0% among 25–34 year-olds, compared with 4.5% among those aged 55 and older. Men were more likely than women to agree, at 17.9% versus 6.7%.

Smoking’s perceived social status appears in other comparisons as well. Overall, 14.3% said smoking is cooler than vaping. That rose to 23.3% among 21–24 year-olds, 21.1% among 25–34 year-olds, 21.4% among men, and 30.4% among cigarette smokers. Separately, 19.9% said smoking is cooler than using nicotine pouches/snus, including 26.9% of males and 32.0% of 25–34 year-olds.

Taken together, these findings suggest that smoking retains a degree of social appeal among some younger adults, even as most respondents reject the idea that smoking is fashionable or cool. The results point to a perception gap, not a behavioral conclusion.

Table 1: “Smoking is Cool” - respondents agreeing

Smoking is cool	Male	Female	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Respondents agreeing	17.9%	6.7%	30.2%	25.0%	16.1%	11.0%	4.5%

Source: Censuswide survey, February 2026 (n=1,973)

02. Harm Perceptions and Relative Risk

This chapter reports how respondents perceive the relative risks of cigarettes, vaping products, nicotine pouches, and nicotine replacement therapies. The generally accepted continuum of risk for nicotine products places combustible products at the highest end, with non-combustible products lower on the spectrum.² Across several questions, many respondents selected answers suggesting they do not sharply distinguish between combustible cigarettes and some non-combustible products.

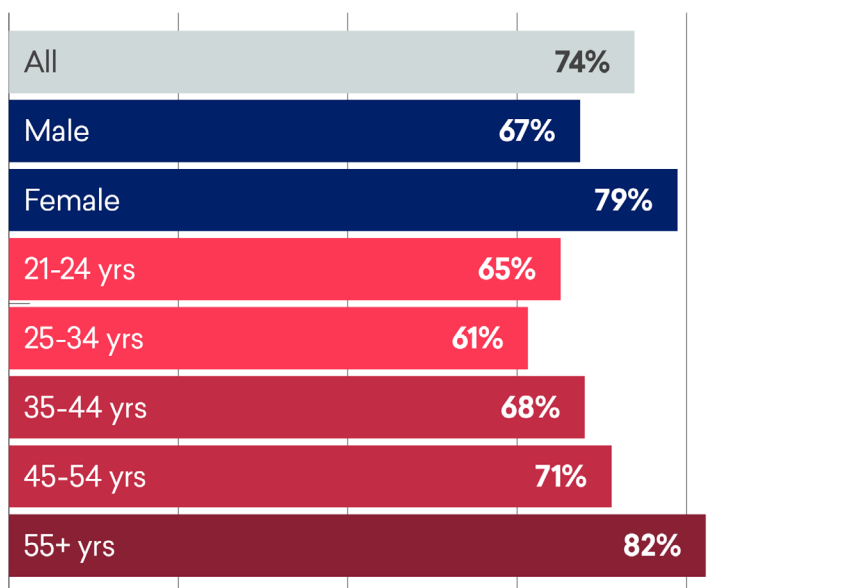
Cigarettes: Recognized as Harmful, but Generational Gaps Emerge

While 94.8% of respondents agree smoking is harmful, the intensity of concern varied by age. Among respondents aged 55 and older, 82.2% describe cigarettes as “very harmful,” compared with 61.3% among 25–34 year-olds and 65.1% of 21–24 year-olds.

The survey also found that some respondents believe the harms of smoking are exaggerated. Overall, 14.9% said the statement that “the harm of smoking is exaggerated” was true, while 77.9% said it was false. Agreement was higher among younger adults: 30.2% of 21–24 year-olds and 27.5% of 25–34 year-olds selected “true,” compared with 9.4% of those aged 55 and older.

+1,900 people in the U.S. that stated:

“Cigarettes are very harmful”



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

² Felicione NJ, et. al. “Oral Nicotine Pouches: Rising Popularity and State of the Science.” *Public Health Reports*. Published online April 28, 2025.

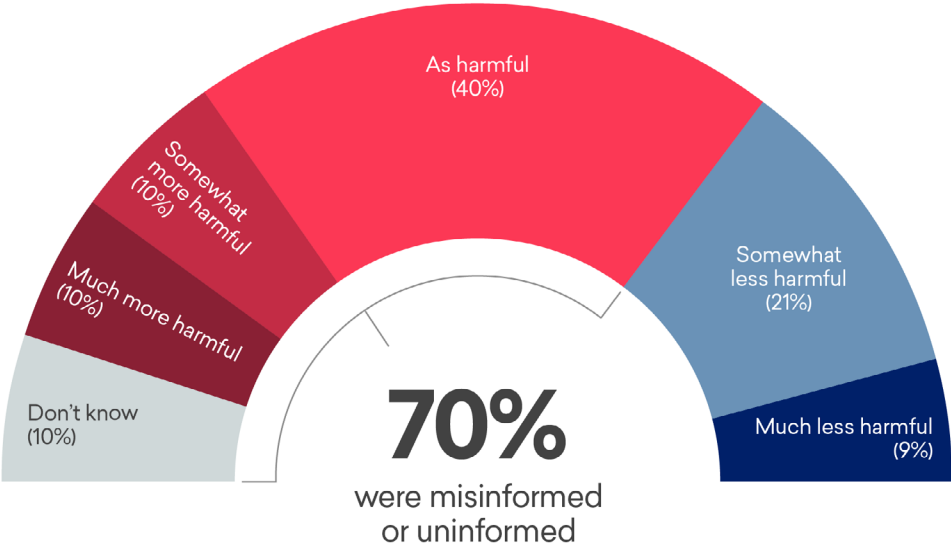
Nicotine Pouches: How Respondents Compare Them with Cigarettes

Nicotine pouches are a growing product category in the U.S., but survey responses point to considerable uncertainty in how respondents compare them with cigarettes. Overall, 60.6% said nicotine pouches are as harmful (40.4%) or more harmful (20.2%) than cigarettes. By contrast, 29.0% said nicotine pouches are less harmful.

Recent reviews of the scientific literature place nicotine pouches lower on the risk spectrum than combustible cigarettes, while emphasizing that they are not risk-free and that the evidence base is still developing.

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

How harmful do you believe nicotine pouches are compared to smoking?

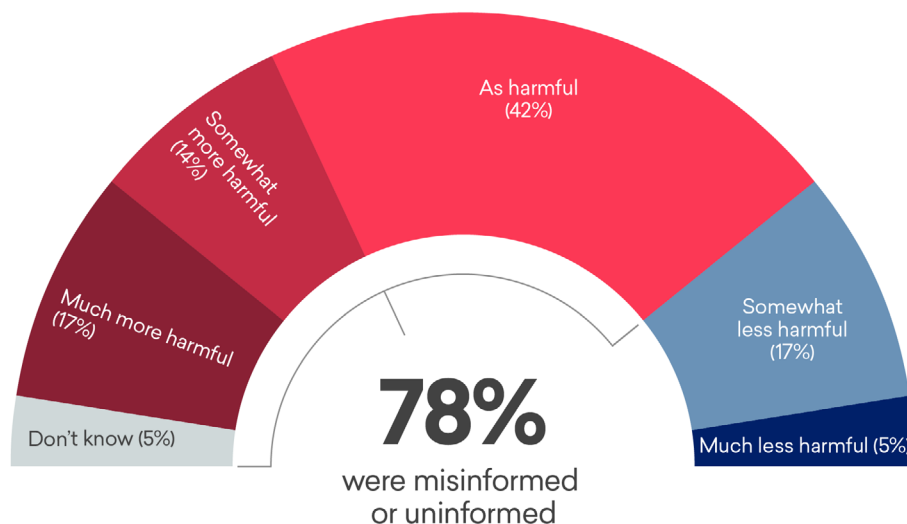


Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

The contrast between users and non-users is notable. Among nicotine pouch users, 64.4% selected “less harmful than cigarettes,” compared with 18.3% of non-users. This difference may reflect familiarity, information sources, or other factors, but the survey does not identify the reason. Nicotine pouches are not risk-free, and this report does not assess clinical outcomes.

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

How harmful do you believe vaping is compared to smoking?



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

Vaping: How Respondents Compare It with Cigarettes

A total of 73.0% of respondents said vaping is as harmful as or more harmful than smoking cigarettes, including 30.8% who said vaping is more harmful and 42.2% who said it is as harmful. These responses indicate that many respondents do not view vaping as presenting lower risk than cigarettes.

FDA has stated that e-cigarettes can generally be a lower-risk alternative for adults who smoke cigarettes, while emphasizing that they are not risk-free, contain nicotine, may deliver harmful chemicals, and require complete switching from cigarettes to receive the full health benefit. FDA has also authorized certain e-cigarette products through its premarket review process after finding that they met the statutory public health standard³.

The perception that vaping is as harmful as or more harmful than smoking was particularly heightened among certain groups. Among cigarette smokers in the survey, 83.7% selected “as harmful” or more harmful (42.5% more harmful, 41.2% as harmful). Among respondents aged 21–24, 41.9% said vaping is more harmful, the highest rate of any age group.

Even among vape users, many did not identify vaping as less harmful than smoking. Among this group, 33.2% said vaping is as harmful as smoking and 21.1% said it is more harmful. Only 42.5% of vape users said vaping is less harmful than smoking.

³ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. “E-Cigarettes, Vapes, and Other Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS),” content current as of March 12, 2026

Nicotine Replacement Therapies: The Familiarity Premium

Respondents were more likely to identify nicotine replacement therapy products as less harmful than cigarettes than they were for nicotine pouches or vaping products. Half of respondents, 50.2%, said nicotine gum is less harmful than cigarettes, while 54.7% said the same of nicotine patches. By comparison, 29.0% said nicotine pouches are less harmful, and 21.5% said vaping is less harmful.

This may reflect familiarity and credibility. Nicotine gum and patches have been available for decades as FDA-approved cessation products, while nicotine pouches and many vaping products are newer, less familiar to many consumers, and not marketed or sold for cessation purposes.

Compared with responses for nicotine pouches and vaping, these results suggest that respondents distinguish nicotine replacement therapies from combustible cigarettes. The survey does not determine the cause of that difference.

Table 2: Perceived Relative Harm vs. Cigarettes (% of Respondents)

Product	More Harmful	As Harmful	Less Harmful	Don't Know
Vaping	30.8%	42.2%	21.5%	5.5%
Nicotine Pouches	20.2%	40.4%	29.0%	10.3%
Nicotine Gum	13.3%	25.7%	50.2%	10.7%
Nicotine Patches	12.9%	22.7%	54.7%	9.6%

Source: Censuswide survey, February 2026 (n=1,973)

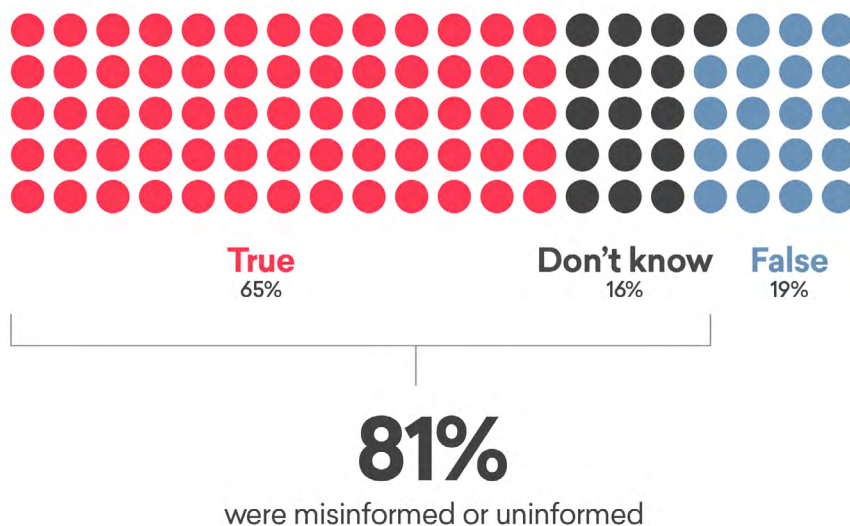
03. How Respondents View Nicotine and Product Risks

The harm perception data described in Chapter 2 suggests that many respondents may not distinguish clearly between nicotine, combustion, and different nicotine-product categories. The survey tested multiple statements and recorded whether respondents believed each to be true, false, or did not know.

Nicotine: Cancer and Other Myths

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

Nicotine causes cancer: True or False?



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

Nearly two-thirds, 64.9%, of survey respondents said nicotine causes cancer. However, scientific literature generally attributes most smoking-related cancer risk to combustion and the chemicals in cigarette smoke rather than nicotine alone. ⁴ Agreement was higher among women than men, at 71.4% versus 56.5%, and increased with age: 68.6% of those aged 55 and older selected this response, compared to 53.5% of 21–24 year-olds. Even among cigarette smokers, 69.0% said nicotine causes cancer, while nicotine pouch users were less likely to do so, at 46.5%.

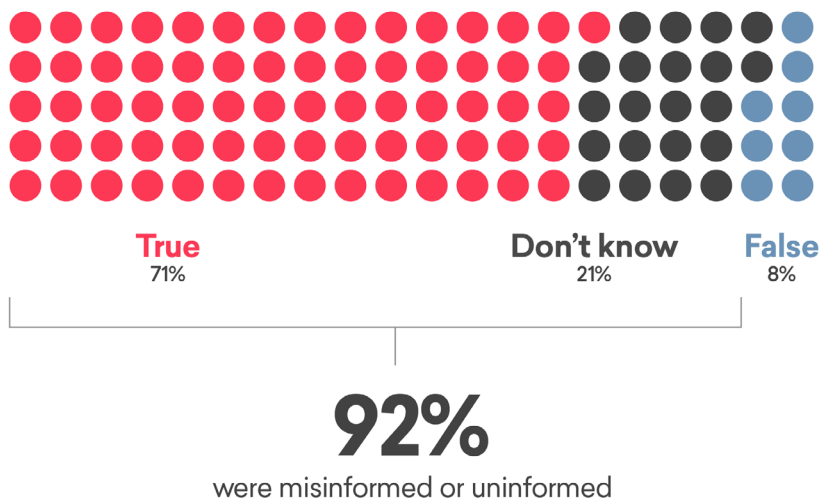
Almost half of respondents, 45.7%, also said nicotine is the most harmful part of a cigarette. That view was strongest among adults aged 55 and older, at 51.8%, and among women, at 50.1%. These responses suggest that many participants associate nicotine itself with the harms of smoking, rather than distinguishing nicotine from the effects of combustion and smoke exposure.

⁴ [U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "Chemicals in Tobacco Products and Your Health." Content current as of April 23, 2026](#)

Nicotine Pouches and Oral Cancer

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

Nicotine pouches and snus cause oral cancer: True or False?



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

A significant 71.2% of respondents selected “true” when asked whether nicotine pouches and snus cause oral cancer. Because the survey item combines both products, responses should be interpreted as perceptions about the combined claims rather than separate views on nicotine pouches or snus individually.

Nicotine pouches and snus are distinct product categories. Both are non-combustible oral products, but they differ in composition: Swedish snus contains tobacco leaf, whereas nicotine pouches are typically tobacco leaf-free.

The FDA has authorized modified-risk claims for eight snus products, including the claim that use instead of cigarettes puts users at lower risk of mouth cancer and several other serious diseases. These modified-risk orders were renewed in 2024.⁵

The FDA has also authorized multiple nicotine pouch products through the Premarket Tobacco Product Application (PMTA) pathway. According to the agency, these authorized pouch products contain substantially lower amounts of harmful constituents than cigarettes and most smokeless tobacco products and therefore pose a lower risk of cancer and other serious health conditions.⁶

These FDA authorizations do not mean nicotine pouches or snus are risk-free, nor do they rule out all possible oral health risks. They also do not permit broad health-related claims for every product in either category.

⁵ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, “FDA Renews Authorization for 8 General Snus Products to be Marketed with Reduced Risk Claim,” content current as of November 7, 2024.

⁶ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, “FDA Authorizes Marketing of 20 ZYN Nicotine Pouch Products after Extensive Scientific Review,” content current as of January 16, 2025.

Beliefs About Vaping

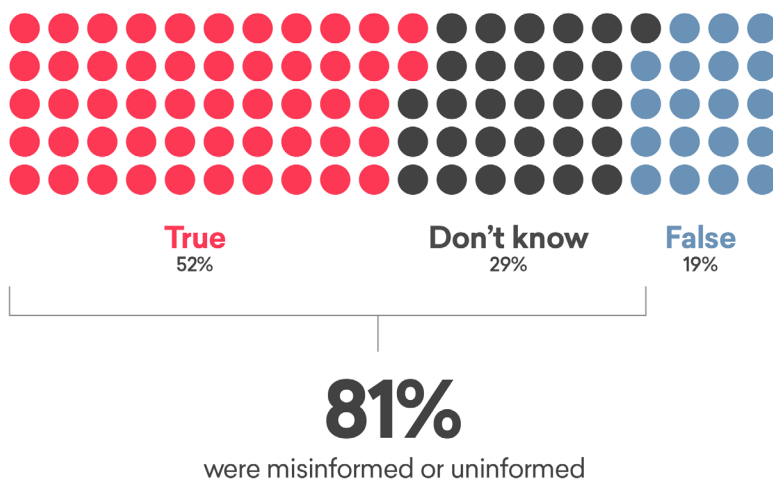
Misperceptions about vaping were widespread. Over half of respondents, 52.1%, said that vaping exposes users to more chemicals than smoking. Among cigarette smokers, this rose to 60.3%. Even among vape users, 40.4% selected this response, with a similar share of nicotine pouch users doing the same at 41.6%.

Respondents were also uncertain about second-hand vaping. Overall, 44.5% said second-hand vaping is as harmful as second-hand smoking, while 28.9% said they did not know and 26.7% rejected the statement.

The statement that vaping causes “popcorn lung” also drew substantial agreement, with 44.2% of respondents selecting “true.” Cancer Research UK states that there have been no confirmed cases of popcorn lung linked to e-cigarettes, while also noting that vaping is not risk-free and its long-term effects are still being studied.

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

Vaping exposes you to more chemicals than smoking: True or False?



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

Table 3: Selected Beliefs About Nicotine Products (% Believing “True”)

Selected Statement Tested	Overall	Male	Female	55+
Nicotine causes cancer	64.9%	56.5%	71.4%	68.6%
Pouches/snus cause oral cancer	71.2%	67.2%	74.5%	75.5%
Vaping exposes users to more chemicals than smoking	52.1%	48.2%	55.4%	55.2%
Nicotine is the most harmful part of a cigarette	45.7%	40.4%	50.1%	51.8%
Second-hand vaping as harmful as second-hand smoking	44.5%	40.5%	47.7%	48.8%
Vaping causes popcorn lung	44.2%	39.8%	47.7%	38.0%

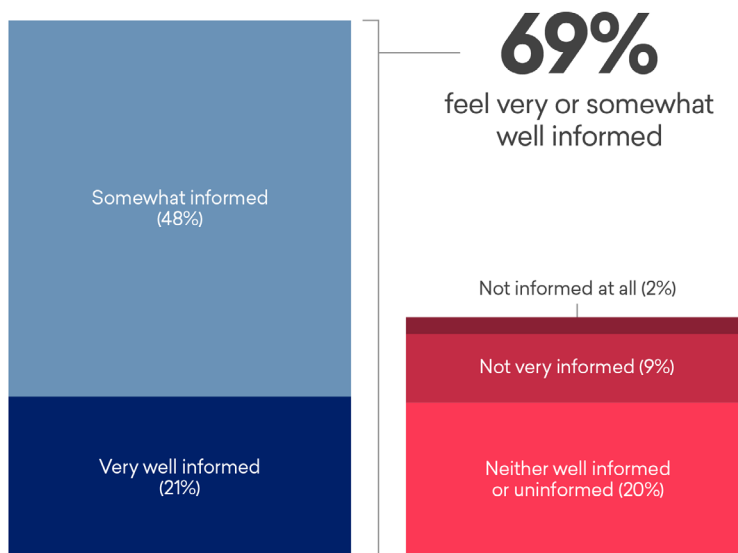
Source: Censuswide survey, February 2026 (n=1,973)

04. Information Sources and Self-Reported Knowledge

This chapter examines the relationship between respondents' self-reported knowledge of nicotine-product risks and where they say they get information on the subject. The results show a clear gap: most respondents say they feel informed, but responses elsewhere in the survey suggest important misunderstandings about nicotine, combustion, and relative product risk.

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

How informed do you feel about the risks and harm profiles of different nicotine products?



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

Confidence vs. Accuracy: The Knowledge Paradox

A total of 68.9% of respondents said they feel somewhat or very well informed about the risks and harm profiles of different nicotine products, including 20.7% who said they feel very well informed. Self-reported knowledge was also higher among men than women, at 72.9% versus 65.7%.

Younger respondents were also more likely to say they feel informed. Among 25–34 year-olds, 78.5% said they feel somewhat or very well informed, compared with 60.9% of those aged 55 and older. Yet the survey responses described above suggest that confidence does not always correspond with accurate understanding of nicotine risk.

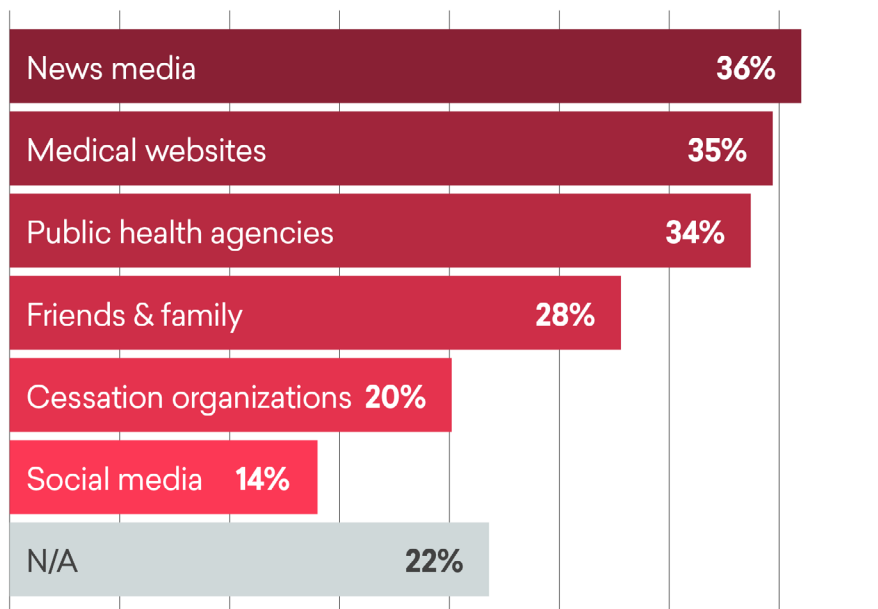
Sources of Information

When asked where they learn about nicotine products and their risk profiles, respondents most often cited news media (36.0%), medical websites (34.7%), and public health agencies (33.7%). Friends and family were cited by 27.8%, while 20.1% cited smoking cessation organizations. Notably, 21.8% of respondents said they do not get or look for this information at all.

News media was the single most common source cited by survey respondents. The survey does not identify which sources are driving particular beliefs, but the results raise questions about how relative risk is communicated to the public. Despite high self-reported confidence, many respondents selected answers elsewhere in the survey that suggest confusion about nicotine, combustion, and the relative risks of different product categories.

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

Where Do You Get Information About Nicotine Products?

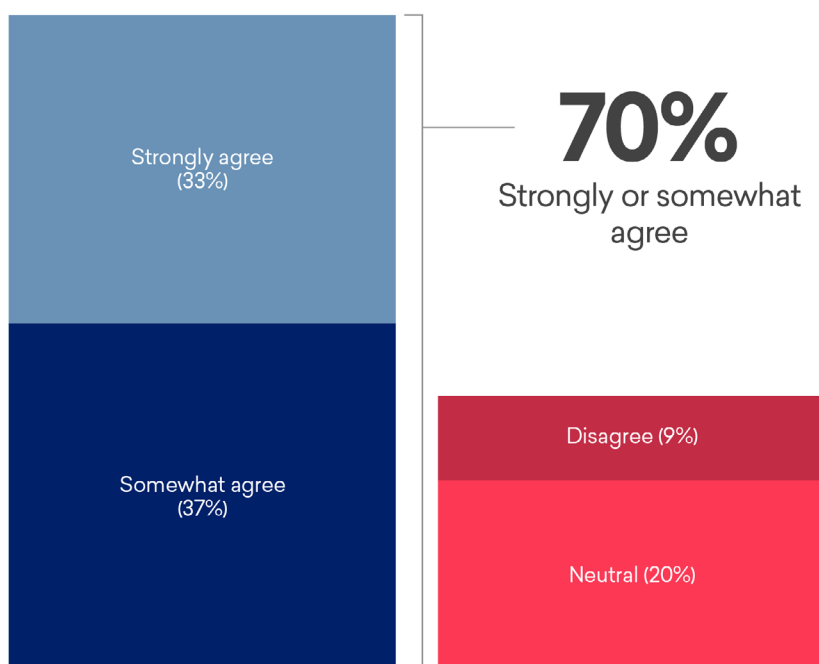


Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

05. The “Vaping Epidemic” Framing

+1,900 people in the U.S. were asked:

Is there a vaping epidemic in the United States?



Censuswide survey commissioned by Nicokick.com, 1,973 U.S. respondents (21+), March 2026

The survey asked respondents whether they agree with the statement that there is a “vaping epidemic” in the U.S. The results indicate that this framing remains familiar to many adults.

A total of 70.5% of survey respondents agreed, including 33.2% who strongly agreed. Only 9.1% disagree. Women were slightly more likely than men to agree, at 71.9% versus 68.9%. Agreement was also high across all regions, with the Midwest highest at 72.3%.

That perception exists alongside a substantial decline in youth vaping since its 2019 peak. According to National Youth Tobacco Survey data, current e-cigarette use among middle and high school students fell from 20.0% to 5.2% in 2025.⁷ E-cigarettes nevertheless remained the most commonly used tobacco or nicotine product among youth, which helps explain why the “epidemic” framing continues to carry strong public salience.

⁷ Park-Lee E, et al. “Nicotine and Tobacco Product Use Among U.S. Middle and High School Students – National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2025.” medRxiv (preprint), March 24, 2026. Published online March 24, 2026.

Conclusion

The survey results suggest that many U.S. adults in this sample recognize smoking as harmful but do not sharply distinguish between cigarettes and some non-combustible nicotine products when asked about relative risk.

Key findings include: 64.9% said nicotine causes cancer; 45.7% said nicotine is the most harmful part of a cigarette; 73.0% said vaping is as harmful as or more harmful than smoking; and 60.6% said pouches are as harmful as or more harmful than cigarettes.

These findings suggest substantial gaps between some respondents' views and parts of the current scientific literature on relative risk.

A cultural gap adds to the knowledge gap. Younger respondents were more likely to view smoking as fashionable or socially appealing with 36.3% of 25–34 year-olds agreeing that smoking is “back in fashion” and 32.0% of 25–34 year-olds saying smoking is cooler than using nicotine pouches / snus.

These social perceptions may further complicate efforts to communicate accurate information about nicotine-product risk. The findings may be relevant to how adults interpret nicotine-product risk information. If adult smokers perceive little difference in risk between cigarettes and non-combustible products, that may affect whether they consider using the products. The prominence of news media as a reported information source, combined with the gap between self-reported knowledge responses to specific survey questions, suggests there is room for clearer communication about nicotine risks.

To support informed adult decision-making, communications about nicotine products should be factual, balanced, and carefully grounded in authoritative sources and product-specific regulatory status.

Methodology

This survey was conducted by Censuswide on behalf of Haypp Group (Snusbolaget Norden AB). A total of 1,973 adults aged 21 and over in the United States were surveyed between 13 and 16 February 2026.

Respondents were asked a series of questions covering their attitudes toward smoking, perceptions of the relative harm of different nicotine products, beliefs about specific nicotine-related health claims, and sources of information about nicotine products.

Data was collected across demographic groups including gender, age cohort (21–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55+), U.S. region (Midwest, Northeast, South, West), and nicotine product usage (cigarettes, nicotine pouches, tobacco snus, vapes/e-cigarettes, and no nicotine use).