

EVIDENCE BRIEF

Impact of Interventions on Vaping Prevalence in Schools

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Key Messages

- Searches were conducted to discern the impact of school level interventions on vaping prevalence. Interventions that were included were those that reinforce or support vaping restrictions/policies in school and on school property.
- No published evidence was found on the impact of these interventions on vaping prevalence (prevalence of vaping, vaping initiation, or ever vaped) in school-aged populations 18 and younger.

Issue and Research Question

There have been issues and concerns with youth vaping in schools and on school property across Ontario. It is unclear whether interventions to address vaping on school property are effective. The Ministry of Education has responded to concerns with updated guidance and some additional resources to support school boards to address vaping in schools.

The [Smoke-Free Ontario Act \(SFOA\), 2017](#) outlines restrictions around smoking and vaping, in indoor spaces, on outdoor grounds including playgrounds and fields, and within 20 metres of school property.^{1,2} The [SFOA, 2017](#) legislation applies at all times to staff, students, parents, and visitors on school property, and includes parking lots, vehicles, and athletic fields. School staff and administration are charged with enforcing these regulations, with local public health units having a role in inspections and response to smoking and vaping complaints. Penalties, including charges and fines, can be issued for failing to comply with the [SFOA, 2017](#).

School staff, students, parents and health officials have been very vocal over vaping concerns at schools.^{3,4} School staff have also expressed challenges with attempting to manage use and reinforce compliance of smoking and vaping restrictions in schools. Media reports across the country have cited these concerns and strategies that staff are implementing to address these issues.^{3,5,6} There were some Ontario schools that decided to explore additional supports to help manage compliance on school property, with the installation of vaping detectors in areas of the schools that were known to have the highest rates of non-compliance among students.^{7,8}

The Ministry of Education issued [Policy/Program Memorandum 128 \(PPM 128\), The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct](#) on June 25, 2014, which would take effect as of September 1, 2024.^{9,10} Through the release of this policy/program memorandum the Ministry of Education acknowledged the concerns and challenges that schools are facing to prevent vaping on

school property. In addition to added direction on how schools and school boards should be addressing vaping on school property in the upcoming school year. The Ministry also announced additional funding providing the option for school boards to purchase and install vape detectors.^{7,8} Given that the development and use of vape detectors is a very new intervention there is no available evidence of their effectiveness for schools at the time of writing (refer to [Evidence Brief Vape Detector Effectiveness for School Property](#)). Therefore, there was a need to explore what evidence was available to help inform school level interventions to support reducing use of vaping devices on school property.

This document focuses on the school-based interventions that reduce school-level vaping prevalence in the school-aged/youth population (18 years and younger). The primary purpose of this evidence brief is to answer the question: **What is the impact of school vaping restrictions or bans (inclusive of interventions that reinforce or support vaping restrictions), on vaping prevalence at the school level?**

Methods

Public Health Ontario (PHO) Library Services designed and executed scientific literature searches August 1, 2024, limiting the search to English language articles published 2015 to the present. MEDLINE, Embase, the Health Policy Reference Center, and ERIC were searched. The full search strategy is available upon request from Public Health Ontario.

For inclusion, papers must have focused on a school-aged population (18 or younger), must have featured school policy and/or legislation that restricts vaping on in and on school property, and must have been a primary study or review (systematic review with or without meta-analysis) that reported one or more of the following outcomes: prevalence of vaping, vaping initiation, or ever having vaped. Papers that focused on quit attempts or included young adults were excluded. Evaluation papers that did not have prevalence outcomes were also excluded. This evidence synthesis aimed to locate findings from programs that reinforce or support vaping restrictions/policies in school and on school property. Search results were screened by a single reviewer with the content lead validating screening decisions. All full-text papers retrieved for review were reviewed and validated by both a reviewer and content lead. Given no relevant papers were identified, quality appraisal and data extraction were not done.

Results

A comprehensive search strategy did not locate any relevant papers reporting the impact of school-level programs that reinforce or support vaping policies on school property on school level vaping prevalence.

Limitations and Strengths

This synthesis is the result of a comprehensive systematic search for published literature; however, no literature met inclusion criteria at the time of searches.

Conclusion

At this time, there is a lack of published evidence around school policy and/or legislation that restricts vaping on school property, including programs that reinforce or support vaping restrictions/policies and the impact of these interventions on vaping prevalence at the school level. Such policies and programs should be evaluated, with results shared, to contribute to the evidence and understanding of the most effective interventions available to schools.

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