

Monitoring New and Emerging Nicotine and Tobacco Product Use Among Adolescents in the DRC

Executive Summary

Adolescent use of **new and emerging nicotine and tobacco products (NENTPs)** is a growing concern in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In 2024, **more than 18% of adolescents aged 10–17** reported **having tried tobacco or nicotine products**. Within this group, **nearly 220,000 adolescents** reported **ever using newer products such as electronic-cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and oral nicotine pouches**. In contrast to World Health Organization (WHO) findings that show steady increases of tobacco use with age, the **DRC data indicate elevated experimentation among younger children (aged 10-12) compared to older adolescents (aged 16-17)**. This early exposure highlights not only a **heightened risk of nicotine addiction and long-term health harm**, but also the **impact of weak regulation and misleading marketing** that make these products appear safe or modern. Together, these trends signal a shifting tobacco landscape and the need for **urgent preventive action, stronger regulation, and alignment with global best practices under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)**.

Youth NENTP Use Trends

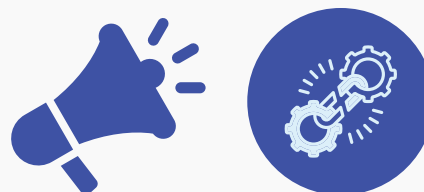
Over 18% of adolescents (aged 10-17) in the DRC (**~5.08 million**) have tried tobacco or nicotine products, and nearly **220,000** have already experimented with newer products such as nicotine pouches or e-cigarettes, with some initiating use as early as **10–12 years old**. The spread of NENTPs use across provinces such as Kasai =**3.42%** and Oriental =**1.18%**, signals a rapidly emerging public health concern that demands urgent policy attention and preventive action.



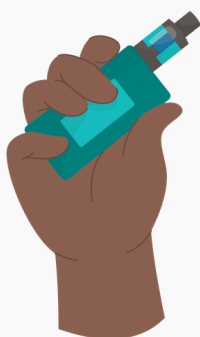


Key Concerns

- **Early exposure:** Adolescents as young as 10–12 years have already initiated the use of NENTPs, indicating an early age of experimentation and raising concerns about the onset of nicotine use during pre-teen years.
- **Aggressive marketing:** Ads directed at youth mainly via social networks, and flavored products help drive uptake.
- **Weak regulation:** NENTPs are not officially regulated in the DRC and current laws do not comprehensively address NENTPs, leaving adolescents unprotected.



Prevalence



- An estimated **220,000** adolescents currently use emerging nicotine and tobacco products.
- **Nicotine pouches** are most common (192,000 users), followed by e-cigarettes (55,000 users).
- **Boys consistently report higher tobacco use than girls** across all age groups.
- **Top reasons for use:** appealing flavors, the belief that these products are less harmful, and peer influence.



Key Recommendations

1. **Apply WHO FCTC Article 13 measures** to address NENTP use, including restrictions on advertising, promotion, sponsorship.
2. **Impose taxes on NENTPs**, particularly on HTPs, aligning with FCTC Article 6, as these products are increasingly entering low- and middle-income markets like the DRC with minimal fiscal regulation
3. **Ban flavored products that appeal to youth**, to prevent initiation and long-term use, consistent with measures under FCTC Article 9 and 10 on the regulation of contents and disclosure of tobacco products.
4. **Consider bans on NENTPs, which will be particularly effective given the low youth prevalence in the DRC.** This will require rigorous enforcement to prevent illicit trade, as recommended under FCTC Article 15.
5. **Invest in early prevention campaigns targeting children and parents.**
6. **Conduct high-quality research into the health impacts of NENTPs** in order to make informed decisions. Governments and regulatory bodies should request and facilitate funding for independent and high-quality research in this field.













Conclusion

NENTPs are rapidly spreading in the DRC and present a public health threat to young people. **Rising experimentation, weak regulation, and misleading marketing** risk undermining recent gains in tobacco control. These products expose adolescents to nicotine early, increasing the **likelihood of lifelong addiction and long-term health complications**. To prevent this emerging epidemic, the DRC needs a **strong national response grounded in the WHO FCTC**, one that **enforces clear laws, applies effective taxes, restricts youth-targeted marketing, and invests in education and community awareness**. Coordinated action now will **protect young people and safeguard the country's future health and development**.

For references and more information on the use of novel and emerging nicotine and tobacco products in the DRC, visit:

<https://drc.tobaccocontroldata.org/en/home/nouveaux-produits-du-tabac-et-de-la-nicotine-en-rdc/>

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