

The Illinois Youth Tobacco Survey: Preliminary Findings

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Youth tobacco use remains a significant public health concern, contributing to long-term cardiopulmonary health risks. Understanding the prevalence, trends, and associated behaviors of tobacco use among youth is critical for guiding prevention strategies. For the first time in nearly a decade, the Illinois Youth Tobacco Survey (ILYTS) is collecting comprehensive data on tobacco use patterns, attitudes, and exposure among Illinois middle and high school students, providing essential insights for tailored interventions.

Purpose: The primary aim of this public health surveillance project was to evaluate the prevalence of tobacco use, including products like e-cigarettes, and to examine factors influencing these behaviors among Illinois youth.

Design: This public health surveillance project gathers survey data from a representative sample of public and private Illinois schools. Schools were randomly selected throughout the state, removing schools with less than 15 students in any grades 6-12. Surveys and consent forms were distributed by teachers at each school in 1-2 classes per grade level. Data was collected anonymously to ensure accuracy and participation.

Methods: A standardized survey tool based on the National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS) [a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study] was created in the Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) tool to assess tobacco use behaviors, exposure to secondhand smoke, attitudes toward tobacco, asthma prevalence, and demographic variables. Statistical analyses will be performed to identify prevalence estimates for these and other related variables.

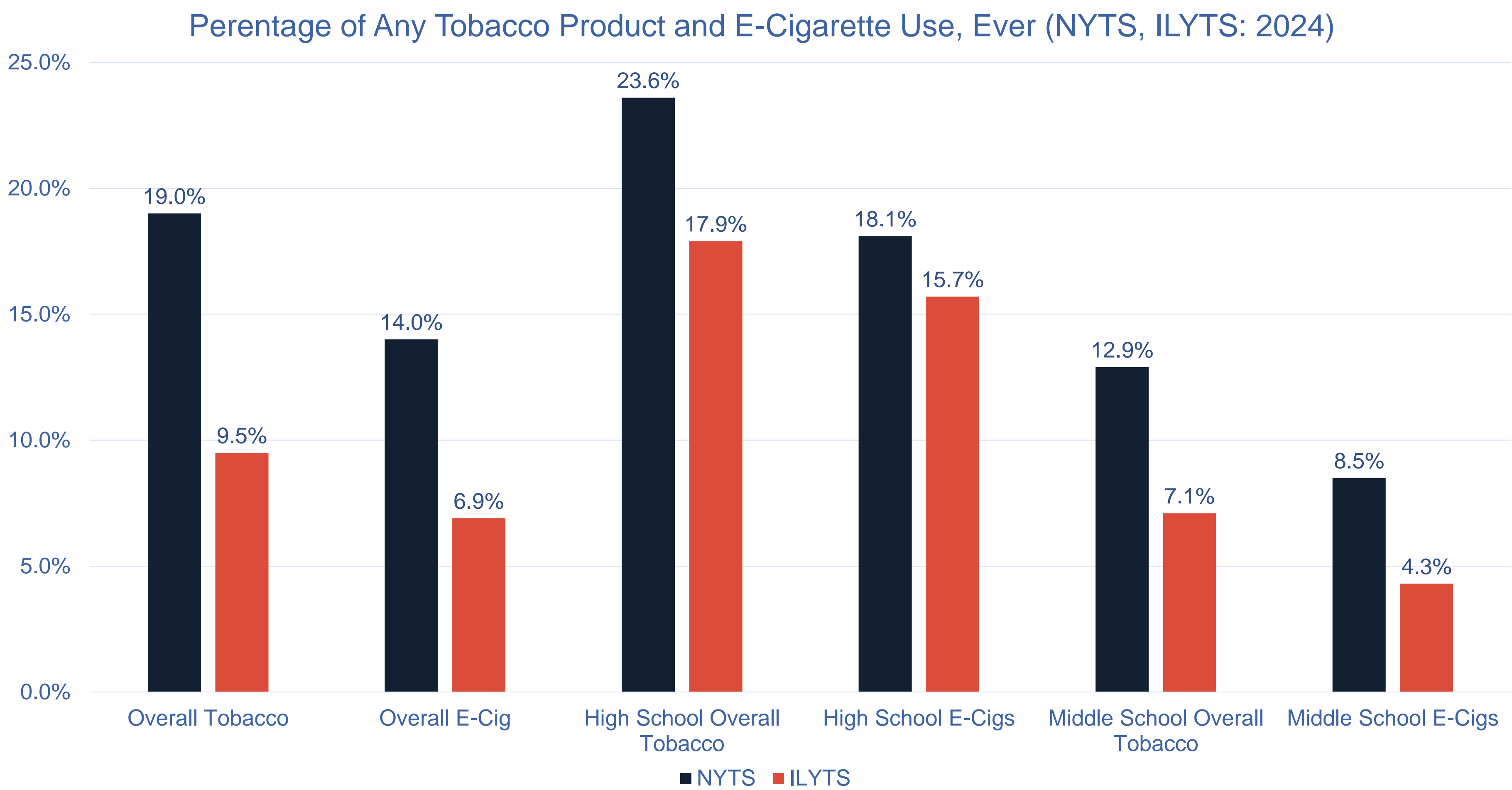
Results: Data collection and analysis is currently underway, and in coordination with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), a full report will be provided to IDPH by the end of Summer 2025. Preliminary results of data collected from 20 schools participating in Fall 2024 suggest that students in sampled high schools and middle schools use tobacco and tobacco products at rates lower than the national average. Findings from the NYTS suggest that 19.0% of middle school and high school students have ever used any tobacco product, while ILYTS pilot data shows a rate of 9.5% across these same grades; e-cigarettes show a difference of use at 14.0% (NYTS) and 6.9% (ILYTS).

Conclusions: Although results are forthcoming, data from this project will be compared to NYTS trends and used to establish an evidence-base to inform policy and community program development aimed at reducing tobacco product consumption among youth. A state level report, provided to IDPH, may be used to address accessibility and risk behaviors associated with tobacco products, potentially impacting long-term cardiopulmonary health at the population level.

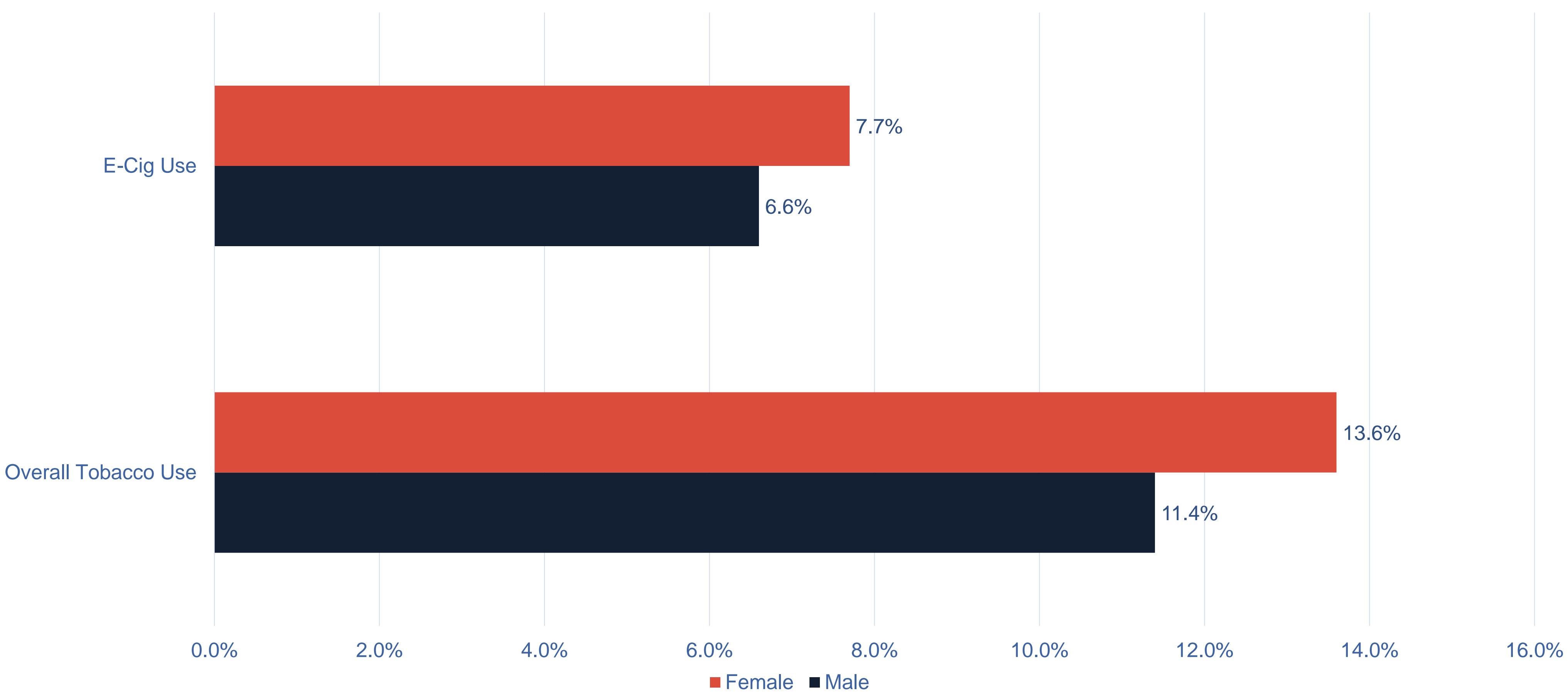
Methods

- The ILYTS is a cross-sectional surveillance study designed to assess tobacco use and attitudes among middle and high school students across the state of Illinois.
- Survey links are generated and shared with specific classes in grades 6-12 in each school.
- Preliminary analyses were conducted using R Studio and Microsoft Excel, focusing specifically on trends in overall tobacco use and e-cigarette use among students from the sampled schools during Fall 2024.
- Additionally, comparisons were made between our current data and the recent annual results from the NYTS to provide context for our findings in relation to broader national trends.

Results



Tobacco Use by Sex (ILYTS, 2024)



Conclusions

- Our preliminary findings suggest that students in sampled schools in Illinois have used tobacco and tobacco products (including e-cigarettes) at lower rates than the national average.
- Healthcare professionals should encourage local schools to participate in the Illinois Youth Tobacco Survey (ILYTS) to strengthen data collection and prevention efforts.
- ILYTS findings will inform policies and programs that reduce youth tobacco use, lowering the risk of long-term cardiopulmonary disease.
- Tracking youth tobacco trends, especially e-cigarettes, is key to early intervention and targeted prevention strategies.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). **Tobacco product use among middle and high school students—National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2024.** *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 73(41), 917-920. Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_continuingEducation.html\[7+source\]](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_continuingEducation.html[7+source]).

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Introduction

- Youth tobacco use is a major risk factor for long-term cardiopulmonary disease, making early surveillance and prevention efforts critical for public health.
- The ILYTS is collecting statewide data for the first time in nearly a decade, providing new insights into tobacco use patterns, including e-cigarette prevalence among middle and high school students.
- Understanding youth exposure to tobacco and second-hand smoke is essential for preventing early-onset respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as informing targeted interventions.
- Preliminary findings suggest lower tobacco use rates among Illinois youth compared to national estimates, offering an opportunity to examine protective factors and policy implications.
- This research will support evidence-based policies and community programs aimed at reducing tobacco exposure, ultimately contributing to improved long-term cardiopulmonary health outcomes.