

## How long can America's media companies ignore the public health evidence?

Research studies published over the summer of 2020 describes a chain of harm that connects video tobacco content to vaping uptake, and vaping to COVID-19. Every media policy maker and leader should be aware of this research — and take urgent action.

- 1) Rath JM, Bennett M, Vallone D, Hair EC. [Content analysis of tobacco in episodic programming popular among youth and young adults](#). *Tobacco Control*. 19 June 2020.

**IMPORTANT BECAUSE:** Eighty-six percent of broadcast/cable streaming shows (2015-17) most popular with 15-24 year-olds feature tobacco imagery. Level found is "serving to circumvent the restrictions of tobacco advertising on broadcast TV."

- 2) Truth Initiative. [Straight to Vape: Pervasive tobacco imagery in popular shows poses new threat, making youth more prone to e-cigarette use](#). While You Were Streaming report 2020. 1 September 2020.

**IMPORTANT BECAUSE:** Streaming audience has increased by two-thirds during COVID-19. Reports nearly three-quarters of most popular shows with 15-24 year-olds in 2018-19 featured tobacco and tobacco use doubled in shows rated TV-G and TV-PG. 2019 shows included more than 1,100 tobacco incidents, double the number in 2018 shows. Truth Initiative notes that kids who start vaping are four time more likely to start smoking than non-vapers.

- 3) Bennett M, Hair EC, Liu M, Pitzer L, Rath JM, Vallone DM. [Exposure to tobacco content in episodic programs and tobacco and E-cigarette initiation](#). *Preventive Medicine*. Online. 1 August 2020.

**IMPORTANT BECAUSE:** Exposure to smoking on TV triples the likelihood that young people will start vaping. The more exposure and younger the subject, the more likely to be recruited. First proof that video exposure leads to nicotine use.

- 4) Gaiha SM, Cheng J, Halpern-Felsher B. [Association between youth smoking, electronic cigarette use, and coronavirus disease 2019](#). *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Online. 11 August 2020.

**IMPORTANT BECAUSE:** Young people who smoke and vape are 5-7 times more likely to be infected with COVID-19.

- 5) Patanavanich R and Glantz SA. [Smoking is associated with COVID-19 progression: A meta-analysis](#). *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*. September 2020.

**IMPORTANT BECAUSE:** Smoking is a risk factor for progression of COVID-19 (deterioration after hospitalization, even death). Thirty percent of COVID-19 patients with a history of smoking deteriorated, compared to 18 percent of patients who had never smoked.

As the entertainment industry makes plans to resume production and open theaters, it must also protect its audience by taking long-recommended steps to end young people's exposure to toxic on-screen tobacco imagery. Smoking and the coronavirus are a perfect storm. Hollywood cannot risk the blame for making the pandemic worse.

