

# US probing JUUL's 'deceptive' social media marketing: report

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As concerns about vaping are on the rise, government regulators are probing marketing practices by JUUL, according to a report

US regulators are looking into potentially "deceptive marketing" used by popular e-cigarette brand JUUL Labs that targeted teens, according to a

news report Thursday.

The company declined to confirm any investigation but in a statement Thursday said it ended the short-lived social media campaign and announced new efforts to keep the vaping product out of the hands of adolescents.

The Federal Trade Commission, which handles consumer product complaints, is investigating the marketing practices and is deciding whether to seek monetary damages, The Wall Street Journal reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

It was another blow to the company hit by a recent wave of reports of illness and death linked to e-cigarette use.

It also comes just as Altria, a major shareholder in JUUL, considers a merger with tobacco giant Philip Morris International.

A JUUL spokesperson said the company will always "fully cooperate" with any government agency or regulator, but would not confirm whether an investigation is underway.

"We have never marketed to youth," the spokesperson said in an email to AFP.

"Our earliest marketing campaign in 2015 was intended for adults in the 25-34 year-old demographic and lasted for six months.... Nonetheless, we regret that the campaign was executed in a way that was perceived as appealing to minors."

In addition, the use of paid social media "influencers" to promote the product was tried briefly and abandoned last year, and the company has "exited social media entirely," the official said.

JUUL had used various social media channels to show young adults using the product, and also sold appealing flavors that was associated with an surge in teen vaping.

But the company shut stopped selling the flavored versions in brick-and-mortar stores where teens have easier access to the product.

In a statement on Thursday, the company announced new steps "to combat the issue of youth access, appeal, and use of vapor products," while pressing for raising the age limit on smoking products to 21.

The FTC declined to comment, but in general does not confirm whether it is investigating a company, and all its investigations are nonpublic.

The US Food and Drug Administration chief last year sent a warning letter to JUUL about sales of products to minors and warned of an "epidemic" of vaping among youths amid a massive nationwide crackdown on e-cigarette brands.

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