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Up In Smoke

Vaping Invades Lives Of High School Students

Students in this story will remain anonymous in order to protect them as they speak honestly about this sensitive issue.

“I am officially declaring e-cigarette use among youth an epidemic in the United States.” - U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams

Over the last few years, a new sensation has developed among teenagers: vaping. Performed through electronic cigarettes, which produce an aerosol also known as vapor, vaping serves as a vehicle to quit smoking traditional tobacco cigarettes. Recently, usage has grown massively, especially among teenagers, and many people are worried about the lack of real knowledge on the effects of vaping.

“This is a real health risk, and I don’t think kids know. Just like with marijuana, there are not a lot of studies out there that tell us long-term impact,” Assistant Principal Norm Collins said. “Vaping is just so brand new. We learned the hard way how destructive nicotine and all the things associated with cigarettes was, and millions have died. I would hate for kids to be so addicted to this that in 10 years, they all have cancer of the mouth and they could have avoided it.”

One JUUL pod contains about the same amount of nicotine as a pack of cigarettes. While today’s teenagers are more reluctant to smoke cigarettes than generations past, a study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that vaping is becoming a troubling trend among America’s youth. According to a survey released by the University of Michigan last year, 11 percent of high school seniors vape. Looking at even younger teenagers, 3.5 percent of eighth graders in the United States vape, and most young people see vaping as harmless (According to a Kathleen Raven article in *Yale Medicine*, Sept. 13, 2018).

“A lot of other people were doing it and I was just curious,” a junior said. “If I see someone else doing it, I have to do it. It feels like an obligation. During school, I’ll ask friends for it if I don’t have my own. It’s a relieving of stress type thing that I can go to if I need it.”

There are various e-cigarette companies but the most popular is JUUL Labs, which has captured about 72 percent of the market share since its start in 2015 (according to an article by Linda Richter, *Center On Addiction*, October 2018). JUULs are incredibly small, and they look like flash drives, making them easy to conceal and carry around. Along with their small size, JUUL sells many different flavors of “pods,” which are tiny packets that contain nicotine and other substances. These flavors, which include mango, mint and cucumber, attract the youth in similar ways that cigarette companies previously used to market to teenagers.

“At first flavors definitely did affect me,” a senior said. “I thought, ‘If I’m going to do this to my body, I only want to be doing it with things I actually enjoy.’ Usually the only times I hit it is when I’m doing homework or I’m super stressed, so I guess it’s like a coping mechanism for stress. I do think a lot about being such a guinea pig

Chemicals With High Cancer Risk Found In Saliva And Urine Of Teenagers

Who Vape:

- Acrylonitrile
- Acrolein
- Acrylamide
- Crotonaldehyde
- Propylene Oxide

Nicotine Addiction

Symptoms:

- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Mood Changes

Source: UCSF Study
Reported by Dr. Jennifer Ashton
on *Good Morning America*

There Are 1.3 Million Teens Who Vape
According to the U.S. Surgeon General at a Dec. 18 News Conference

generation. We’re going to get older and we are going to be the people coming out with test results about the effects of this, but we do not know what it does yet.”

In response to concerns about teenage usage and pressure from both the public and government agencies, JUUL recently announced they are halting sales of most of their flavored pods like mango and cucumber, as those are some of their most popular flavors among young people. These flavored pods will still be sold online, but JUUL plans to implement an age verification system prohibiting those under the age of 21 from purchasing their products. In addition, JUUL will shut down Facebook and Instagram posts promoting these flavors, and they have asked Snapchat and Twitter to ensure under-aged people do not see their posts.

“I know a lot of people are stopping because of the stop of sales,” a junior said. “Honestly, I think I’m going to be stopping too because it’s making it harder and harder to do, so it’s like there’s no point.”

Close to home, it is easy to see the prevalence of vaping. With JUULs being so small, they are easy to carry around and hide and the vapor released from e-cigarettes can be easy to contain to a small area where people may not notice. There have been several school events in the past several years where administrators have confiscated students’ JUULs.

“Last year, we had confiscated probably 200 vapes,” Collins said. “I



Because of their small size, JUULs and other e-cigarettes are easy for teenagers to hide and carry around. One JUUL pod contains about the same amount of nicotine as a pack of cigarettes.
Photo by Sarah Johnson, Irvine California

have already gotten dozens this year. After a while, we just throw them away. Some things that people have that they are not supposed to have, if a parent comes up and says ‘yeah, that’s ours and the kid took it,’ and the parent wanted to get it, in the past we would give them back. We have just decided that if it is a vape, we are keeping it.”

Not everyone sees the point in the confiscation of vapes. Vaping, however, is prohibited by the Student Code of Conduct.

“I think it’s a good thing because it is a huge problem and it’s grown in popularity, but at the same time I think there are a lot more important issues they should be focusing on,” a senior said. “I don’t think it’s really fair to us as students for them to try to put all their administrative focus on a problem that is in our personal lives rather than putting their focus on something that’s in our school lives.”

The administration has sent home information to parents about vaping, talked to the PTSO and done advisory lessons on the topic. Some agree that vaping is an issue worth addressing, but not in the way the administration is currently doing it.

“All they do is take it away if they figure it out, but there could be way more consequences to get people to stop doing it,” a junior said. “I think if they showed some effects of it and what it’s doing to your body, then it would wake some people up. If I was in eighth grade or a freshman and knew that, I probably wouldn’t have started doing it.”

As vaping continues to grow in

popularity, more and more studies continue to be carried out to examine the impacts of vaping. On *Good Morning America*, Chief Health and Medical Editor Dr. Jennifer Ashton reported a study from *Monitoring The Future*, which found that the number of high school seniors who vape increased from 11 percent to 21 percent in the past year. Ashton added that the American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes that vaping is considered a danger for young people, highlighting a crucial difference between teen vaping and vaping for those trying to quit traditional smoking.

“There’s nothing on the negative impacts of vaping,” Owner of Tobacco House (Vape & Smoke Shop) on Austin Highway Al said. “Vaping and smoking is a day and night difference. There are no chemicals in vaping. How people do it or do not do it, everyone is totally different, but as far as I know, it’s very healthy for people because it’s totally, totally different when compared to cigarettes.”

There are still many unknowns about the true effects of vaping and, like cigarettes, it may be years before anyone knows the real repercussions. With so many unknowns, the question becomes, how worried should people be about teenagers vaping, and what, if anything, needs to be done?

“It is just not safe some of the things kids are doing,” Collins said. “If you look at my job description and you whittle it down to just one word, safety is what my job is.”

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