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Public Health Corner Article

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Youth E-Cigarette use is a public health threat

By Bonnie Timm, PHN

Vaping is the use of an electronic device to inhale nicotine or other substances into the respiratory system. Vaping uses an atomizer and a cartridge. The cartridge holds the liquid, or e-juice, and the atomizer turns the liquid into a vapor. Vaping devices are known by names such as e-cigarettes, e-pipes, or brand names such as Juul or Blu. It is a new twist on an old vice— smoking. However, tobacco is not a part of vaping. The fact that tobacco is not involved has mistakenly led some to believe that the health risks of vaping are much less than smoking. Just like smoking, damaging side effects of vaping include lung damage and nicotine dependence. The amount of nicotine in a cartridge varies, but is substantially more than that in a cigarette. In some cases, a single cartridge can contain as much nicotine as an entire pack of cigarettes. Because vaping juices are not regulated by the FDA or other agencies, the consumer has no guarantee of the safety, purity or strength of nicotine or other ingredients used in the products. Some liquids contain cancer causing chemicals and heavy metals. These toxins are also in the second hand aerosol, or vape, released into the air. Inhaling second hand vapors passes on the ill effects. Vaping by pregnant women exposes her fetus to nicotine which can have long-term effects and cause developmental problems.

THC, the component in marijuana that causes a high, can be incorporated into vaping juice. This not only impacts the brain, it causes significant and rapid damage to the lungs of its users. THC by vaping has caused two deaths in Minnesota as well as dozens of hospitalizations.

E-cigarette use in all age groups has increased dramatically in the last five years. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, E-cigarette use is more than double conventional cigarette use. Youth are more likely than adults to use e-cigarettes. Products like e-cigarettes, vapes, and e-hookahs typically contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and can harm brain development as teens grow. No amount of nicotine is safe for youth as there may be long-term, damaging effects on learning, memory,

attention, behavior problems, and future addiction. In Minnesota in the last three years, the number of eighth graders using e-cigarettes has almost doubled and twenty-five percent of eleventh graders are e-cigarette users. Seventy-two percent of users in this age group report that their friends supply them with vaping products. Others get products at a vape shop or on the internet. Parents should be aware of what vaping products look like. There is also an array of products sold to disguise the use. The e-cigarettes are made to look like everyday products including pens and highlighters and USB ports. Community efforts, such as passing Tobacco 21 laws or restricting flavored e-juice or restricting the availability of where vaping products are sold, are helpful in curbing vaping in youth. Knowledge and prevention of vaping are powerful tools to improve your health and that of your community.

For more information

Minnesota Department of Health (www.health.state.mn.us) -
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/data/ecigarettes.html>

Minnesota Department of Health - Nicotine dependence assistance
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/initiatives/cessation/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)
https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/index.htm

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(www.samhsa.gov)<https://store.samhsa.gov/substances/nicotine>