

Vaping:

Today's newest trend among teens is not what clothes or shoes to wear or what social media account to be on; while still important, the fastest growing trend is one with long term consequences. This trend is Vaping. According to the FDA and CDC, vaping has reached epidemic levels in the U.S; in the past year, vaping has seen a 78% increase among high school students (to 20.8%) and a 48% increase among middle school students (to 4.9%). Ottawa County teens are just as involved in vaping as the rest of the country. According to the 2017 Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey, 25% or 1 in 4 of our youth have used an electronic delivery device (e-cigarette or vape) in the past month. Many more have used a vape at least once in their lifetime.

For parents, this trend felt like it came out of nowhere. Youth who would never touch a cigarette or any other drug are using vapes at an alarming rate. So, why is this such a hot trend? The first reason is youth do not see the harm in vaping. E-cigarettes and Vapes are marketed as a safer alternative to smoking and are marketed as not having the same chemicals found in traditional tobacco cigarettes. Combine this with the flavors used in vape cartridges and youth see vapes as harmless fun. Additionally, vaping releases large water vapor clouds and youth have identified this as a challenge to make fun shapes.

Vaping and electronic cigarettes are a natural outcome from our digital age. We all have smartphones and smart watches, so it makes sense that we could have an electronic way to smoke. Many e-cigarettes and vapes now look like USB drives, making them appealing to youth.

The e-cigarette manufacturers, through their use of fruity, "fun" flavors, have targeted youth: there are more than 15,000 flavors like gummy bear, cotton candy, and mango (the FDA is currently taking action against flavored vape cartridges). Marketing strategies have been built to attract youth, including the design of the product. Nearly 2 in 5 middle and high school youth saw e-cigarette ads online. Many of our youth may not have the skills or capabilities to be "savvy" media consumers—and will believe the advertising that they see.

But, is vaping really safe? The answer is both "we don't exactly know" and "no". The reality is that vaping is new and so we don't have a lot of research on the long term implications of vaping yet. However, we do know some specific risks that do lend themselves to saying "no", vaping really isn't safe.

- First Nicotine. The e cig liquid contains nicotine, which is highly addictive and negatively affects brain development. Studies have shown that the brain continues to develop until the age of 26—nicotine use may predispose youth to addiction, making other drugs such as cocaine more pleasurable.
- The amount of nicotine in a vape pod varies, but the ease of use often causes the person using a vape to take in more nicotine in a day than someone smoking traditional cigarettes. A typical Juul pod contains as much nicotine as a pack of cigarettes. For youth, this causes a higher rate of nicotine addiction and often means they are more addicted than a teen would have been to traditional cigarettes years ago.
- It's not just water vapor. The liquid that is vaporized in the device contains MANY toxic chemicals—and it also contains many of the same chemicals that are found in traditional cigarettes. These include nickel, tin, chromium, and lead; benzene, a chemical compound used in pesticides and formaldehyde, a chemical compound used in pesticides that may cause cancer. Additionally, the flavorings in e cig liquid, contain diacetyl, a chemical linked to bronchiolitis

obliterans, a condition nicknamed “popcorn lung”. This chemical was often used to flavor microwave popcorn, leading many companies to stop using it as flavoring; however, it is still used in many e-cigarette flavors.

We often hear youth say “it’s just water vapor” about vaping, and a person using vapes does inhale water vapor instead of smoke (when compared to traditional cigarettes). Inhaling water vapor is not healthy for our lungs. Think about when you go outside in the winter and it takes your breath away. This is your lungs response to breathing in conditions that are not conducive to full lung function. This same thing happens when you inhale water vapor. Lungs are not meant to breath in water vapor; they are meant to breath in oxygen. Water vapor in lungs impairs their functioning.

Vapes may be a helpful way to stop smoking or recover from nicotine addiction. They may be a cleaner way to smoke. Adults who choose to use e-cigarettes and vapes in this way may be choosing the healthier option for themselves. However, for youth who are still developing, still growing and still learning, this is a harmful trend.

What can you do?

- Support FDA efforts to regulate vapes: the FDA, in the past few weeks, has moved to ban the sale of flavored e cigarettes at certain retail locations like gas stations and convenience stores and to require age verifications for anyone purchasing vaping products on line.
- Support stores who have stopped selling vapes marketed specifically to youth
- Talk To your youth and teach media literacy
- Attend the February 6th town hall. <https://osapvapingtownhall.eventbrite.com>