

## Substance Abuse - Vaping and teens.

How to help your teen avoid this unhealthy, risky habit

Over the past 10 years, vaping has increased greatly, especially among teens. Vaping is the act of inhaling vapor through an electronic cigarette (e-cigarette). It is used instead of regular cigarettes, and many think they are safer. Liquids for e-cigarettes are available in many flavors such as mint, mango and vanilla cream. This may increase their appeal to teens.

However, studies are showing that vaping and e-cigarettes are not as safe as many may think. Here's what to know about vaping and its health risks.

### Are e-cigarettes safer than regular cigarettes?

E-cigarettes don't have tobacco; usually don't have a scent and they don't make secondhand smoke. However, it can still cause nicotine addiction. Nicotine is a chemical that can affect brain health, especially in teens whose brains are still developing.

"Many years ago, nicotine addiction was considered less of a problem and not as risky as smoking tobacco," says David Atkinson, M.D., Medical Director of the Teen Recovery Program at Children's Health<sup>SM</sup>. "However, people with nicotine addiction are frequently anxious and depressed, have less of an ability to concentrate without the drug, have less patience and feel worse than their peers."

Dr. Atkinson also says becoming addicted to nicotine, particularly at a young age, can lead to other addictions. Many people use e-cigarettes rather than tobacco cigarettes thinking that they are safer. But if they have never smoked, they can become addicted to the nicotine in e-cigarettes. Vaping also increases the risk that teens will use tobacco in the future.

"Nicotine addiction causes kids to be more curious and more willing to experiment with other risky behaviors," says Dr. Atkinson. "If they don't have their vaping device with them, they may be more likely to use a regular cigarette if it was made available to them."

Besides nicotine, e-cigarettes and vaping cartridges can also contain a number of harmful chemicals. When heated and inhaled, these cause many health dangers including "popcorn lung". Popcorn lung is a condition where the lungs are scarred, airways are blocked and leads to breathing problems. Studies have linked vaping to other health risks, including a higher risk of a heart attack. Learn more about other possible health effects from vaping.

### What parents should know about Juuling

Juul is a brand of e-cigarette that is very popular with teens. It is smaller than most e-cigarettes and makes less smoke. It looks like a USB thumb drive and even charges when plugged into a laptop. Because of these things the Juul makes it easier for teens to vape in places like school.

Dr. Atkinson warns Juuling is a faster way to get addicted to nicotine. Teens are more likely to feel sick due to the amount of nicotine delivered to their body in a short amount of time. Another danger of Juuling is that the device is not only used for nicotine. It can also be used with marijuana.

## **How to talk to your kids about vaping**

There is a lot of false information about vaping. It's important for you to have open and honest conversations with your teen about these dangers and health risks.

"Schools are becoming more aware of the use of vaping devices during school hours – yet we still need to expand the awareness and address the issue – just as one would regarding drugs, cigarettes and alcohol," says Dr. Atkinson.

Dr. Atkinson says parents should take the lead in talking to their child about vaping. Encourage your child to leave the room if they see someone vaping. Let them know that they can tell you about vaping they see at school.

Talk to your teen about the future problems that vaping can cause. For instance, some employers test for nicotine addiction as part of the hiring process. Others might view smoking and vaping as unprofessional, which could affect your teen's chances to get a job. Stress the risk of forming a nicotine addiction, and the risk of forming other addictions.

"The problem with nicotine addiction is that the enjoyment of the drug decreases as the desire for it increases," says Dr. Atkinson. "It's a losing game that increases the risk for anxiety and depression."

To help your teen avoid vaping, start talking to them about the risks early on, as early as 5th grade. Be sure they know that it isn't safer than smoking, and it can lead to addiction and other health problems.