



East Central

District Health Department

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

It has been a little over 10 years since e-cigarettes, or vapes, were introduced to the United States. E-cigarettes were marketed as a safer option than cigarettes which has led many people to assume that using e-cigarettes, or vaping, is safe. After all, e-cigarettes can come in flavors like candy and packaging that looks like cute toys or school pens, so how bad can they really be? The truth is vaping causes serious health risks. This includes exposure to dangerous chemicals including the drug nicotine.

What exactly is an e-cigarette and why is it harmful? E-cigarettes are battery-operated vaporizers, meaning they create an aerosol, or vapor, for a user to inhale. When a person puffs on an e-cigarette, the liquid inside a cartridge or pod heats up and becomes the vapor. The vapor typically contains the addictive drug nicotine, flavorings, and other toxic chemicals. These chemicals include **formaldehyde** which is a carcinogen (meaning it can cause cancer), **acrolein** which is an herbicide primarily used to kill weeds, and **metal particles** such as aluminum, lead, nickel, tin, and chromium. Vaping or breathing in the e-cigarette vapor takes these chemicals directly to your lungs which can cause inflammation, lung damage, and even cancer.

What is nicotine and what does it do? Nicotine is an extremely addictive drug. Even one puff of a cigarette or e-cigarette can cause an addiction to nicotine. This is especially bad in e-cigarettes due to the high concentration of nicotine. For example, **one JUUL pod contains as much nicotine as one pack of 20 cigarettes**. Nicotine addiction can lead to increased anxiety, crankiness, cravings, depression, frustration, anger, difficulty concentrating, and restlessness. Additionally, nicotine increases your stress hormone levels which can lead to high blood pressure and increased likelihood of a heart attack.

Can e-cigarettes help people quit other tobacco products? No vaping product has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for adults or teens to quit other tobacco products. However, there is increasing evidence that e-cigarettes have severe long-term side effects. Usage of a vape can also lead to dangerous circumstances because many people do not know what is in the vape when they use it due to mislabeling, lack of regulation on the contents of the vape cartridges, or simply not asking whoever put the vape together.

Aren't there limits on vape products? The FDA has issued limitations on flavored e-cigarette products, including fruit and mint flavors that appeal to kids. Additionally, there is an age limit of 21 years old to be able to purchase vape products. However, Big Tobacco manufacturers are finding loopholes and continuing to market vaping to kids. A 2024 FDA survey revealed that nearly 90% of kids who vape continue to use flavored vaping products like fruit, candy, menthol, and mint. Not only are the flavors marketed for children and

teens, but also the design of the vape itself is too. Vapes come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some vapes are shaped to look like pens, USB drives, recording devices, and small toys. There is a variety of sizes as well; some are mini (often called cig-a-like), mid-size, vape pens, vape pod systems, e-hookahs, e-cigars, advanced personal vaporizers or mods. Although most underage e-cigarette users get their e-cigarettes from peers and family members, many underage users get vaping devices illegally from retail sources according to the Truth Continuous Tracking Survey done in 2022.

Approximately 9% of 8th graders or 2 out of every 20 students in 8th grade have used a vape in Boone, Colfax, Nance, and Platte counties according to the 2023 Nebraska Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Survey. This amount increases as students get older as **28% of 12th graders or 5 of every 20 students in 12th grade have used a vape in Boone, Colfax, Nance and Platte counties** according to the same 2023 SHARP Survey. The SHARP survey also found the current usage of vapes for students is around 5% for 8th graders and 16% for 12th graders.

As parents or guardians, you are the best person to educate and protect your child. Talk to your kids and remember that you are not alone. Schools, healthcare providers and community partners are important allies in helping your kids live a healthy, tobacco-free and vape-free life. Below are some tips to talk to your kids:

1. **The goal is to keep the conversation going.** Listen, ask open-ended questions, and share clear information to support the health of your child. Some questions could be: What do you think about vaping? Are there kids vaping at your school? What would you do if someone offered you a vape? Listen to your children, and try to avoid lecturing, pressuring, and criticizing.
2. **Stay calm.** Just because they know about vapes or are asking you about vaping does not mean they are doing it. Even if they are using a vape, show your disappointment and other emotions, but do your best to remain calm to continue the discussion. If necessary, you can always give some time before continuing the discussion.
3. **Talk in low-pressure moments.** Kids may be less receptive when tired, stressed, or busy. Are you trying to start a conversation while they are studying for a test or playing a video game? Look instead for low-pressure moments, such as when driving in the car. Another good time may be while you are cooking, and they are snacking at the kitchen table.
4. **Keep your talking points short but consistent.** Small, frequent conversations are much more effective than one big sit-down conversation. There can be too much pressure in a serious sit-down and your kids may not listen to you.
5. **Look for teachable moments.** E-cigarettes are often in the news or part of prevention talks at school. Make the conversation relevant to recent events, and your child or teen will not feel like the conversation topic is random or out of the blue.
6. **If your kid is using e-cigarettes, try to understand the reasons why and how they feel about vaping.** Many teens want to quit but have been unable to because nicotine is so addictive. They may struggle because these products are easily accessible – in stores and gas stations, on social media, and sometimes with their peers. As you approach this conversation, understand they may need your help to quit.
 - a. Within Nebraska, we have the *My Life, My Quit* program for youth under 18. Their website is <https://ne.mylifemyquit.org/en-US> or Text "START MY QUIT" to 36072 for help quitting.

b. We also have a *Nebraska Tobacco Quitline* for adults 18 years and over. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or Text QUITNOW to 333888 for help quitting.

7. **Remember, it is fine to not have all the answers.** If you do not know an answer, it is okay to say, “I don’t know” and look it up with your children. They may respect you more for your honesty and taking the time to answer their questions. As a family, you can work together to help each other stay healthy. Below are some websites to learn more.

Vaping Facts. American Lung Association

<https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/helping-teens-quit/talk-about-vaping/vaping-facts>

E-Cigarettes (Vapes). CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/index.html>



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