

## **E-Cigarette Use- The Youth Vaping Epidemic**

Since 2014, e-cigarettes have been the most commonly used tobacco product amongst U.S. youth. According to the 2021 National Youth Tobacco Survey:

- Among youth who currently used e-cigarettes, 43.6 of high school students and 17.2% of middle school students reported using e-cigarettes on 20 or more of the past 30 days.
- More than 1 in 4 high school students and about 1 in 12 middle school students who used e-cigarettes used them daily.
- The most commonly used e-cigarette device type was disposables (53.7%), followed by prefilled or refillable pods or cartridges (28.7%), and tanks or mod systems (9.0%).
- Of those who used, 85.8% of high school students and 79.2% of middle school students used flavored e-cigarettes. The most commonly used flavor types were fruit; candy, desserts, or other sweets; mint; and menthol.

Exposure to e-cigarette advertising and marketing has contributed to how youth view e-cigarettes. Many of our youth have received mixed messages about the safety of e-cigarettes as it has been promoted as a safer and healthier alternative to cigarette smoking. However, “safer” doesn’t mean safe and the use of e-cigarettes by youth can pose serious health risks. Health experts agree that youth use of nicotine in any form, including e-cigarettes, is unsafe. The adolescent years are a time of important brain development. Nicotine exposure during adolescence and young adulthood can cause addiction and harm the developing brain, impacting attention, memory, and learning. Besides nicotine, e-cigarettes can contain other harmful ingredients including toxic chemicals. This includes diacetyl, a chemical linked to serious lung disease; volatile organic compounds such as benzene, which is found in car exhaust; and heavy metals, such as nickel, tin, and lead. In addition to the harmful effects that vaping can have on the lungs and brain, studies have also found that young people who use e-cigarettes are more likely to become smokers.

In addition to curbing advertising and marketing that encourages youth use of e-cigarettes, policy and regulation are key factors in reducing youth tobacco use. In 2019, the legal age of smoking and vaping was raised to 21 across the country. Additionally, following epidemic levels of youth use of e-cigarettes and the popularity of certain flavors of e-cigarette products that appeal to kids, the FDA enforced a policy banning the manufacturing, distribution, and sale of flavored cartridge-based e-cigarettes other than tobacco or menthol. Unfortunately, this policy only targeted reusable vaping devices, like JUUL, and the flavor restrictions did not include disposable vaping products like the Puff Bar or the POSH Vape. The use of disposable vapes has thus increased in popularity amongst youth. Disposable e-cigarettes are designed to be used and thrown away once the e-liquid has run dry. They are portable, discreet, and initially less expensive than a rechargeable electronic device. Most are made with nicotine salt e-juices that provide a stronger hit. Depending on the manufacturer, one disposable e-cigarette ranges from 200-500 puffs and can be purchased on average from \$6 to \$20. In addition to being sold in stores, they are likewise sold all over the internet. Despite the fact that Nebraska law now requires the legal minimum age for use or purchase of tobacco products (including e-cigarettes) to be 21 years of age, most online stores only require consumers to acknowledge that they are 21 by electronically entering a birthdate at checkout.

As the youth vaping epidemic continues, the FDA is taking steps forward to better regulate e-cigarettes in an effort to reduce youth use. This work is comprehensive and includes compliance and enforcement, premarket review of products, and public education. While these are critical initiatives, parents and other caring adults can also play a primary role in prevention and early intervention. It is important for parents to know the products, the risks associated with vaping, and the signs of use. The following are some indicators of use:

- Finding unusual online purchases or packages
- Smelling of minty or sweet scents
- Skipping the caffeine (some e-cigarette users develop a sensitivity to caffeine)
- Putting what appear to be thick markers or pens in the mouth
- Using colorful USB-like devices or Pens
- Finding unusual or unfamiliar items (i.e., batteries and chargers; new products are being manufactured to resemble watches, pens, markers, and other common objects)
- Increased thirst (vaping can cause dehydration of the mouth)
- Nosebleeds (when a person vapes, they typically exhale vapor through the nose, causing dryness)
- Behavioral changes, mood changes, agitation (nicotine diminishes prefrontal cortex)
- Poor academic performance (as a result of nicotine changes in the brain)
- Physical symptoms (nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath during activities, throat clearing, mouth sores)

If you are worried your child may be vaping, schedule an appointment with your healthcare provider or utilize the online tools available at:

<https://teen.smokefree.gov> or <https://truthinitiative.org/thisisquitting>

Knowing the facts about youth e-cigarette use can better equip parents to engage in conversations with their youth about vaping. We know that lecturing doesn't make a huge impact on kids. Rather, tobacco prevention experts recommend approaching conversations with curiosity and open-ended questions as a means to engage in meaningful dialogue about the topic. Not sure how to start the conversation? The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, the American Lung Association, and The Partnership to End Addiction, offer the below helpful guides to get you started.

<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/protectkids/resources-for-parents/tips-on-talking-to-your-kids>

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

<https://drugfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/What-You-Need-to-Know-and-How-to-Talk-to-Your-Kids-About-Vaping-Guide-Partnership-for-Drug-Free-Kids.pdf>

References: American Academy of Pediatrics; American Lung Association; Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; The Partnership to End Addiction; U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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## Empowering Bystanders

We often hear about bullying and how it can take place in many different forms. These include physical, psychological, social isolation, humiliation and cyber bullying. There is also a secondary form of bullying, which is through the bystander. Those who are bullied are not the only ones who suffer from the trauma of someone being bullied. The bystander also experiences trauma in a bullying situation, which can cause the bystander to not act to help the initial victim. This can result in multiple individuals being victimized by the bully. Victimized youth are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and other stress that will inhibit their academic and social performances. Some victimized youth have even died by suicide because they did not know where to turn for help.

So how does a bystander stop this cycle of abuse? A study done in Canada showed it only takes one person and ten seconds to stop a bully. When one student stood up to the bully and showed disapproval of what the bully was doing, the bully would stop the victimization within ten seconds. When bullies are surrounded by others and no one challenges what they are doing, it encourages the bully to continue their behavior. Even sitting by passively watching the incident encourages the bully to continue.

So, what can we do to help bystanders feel more comfortable speaking up and becoming upstanders? One activity that teachers and/or parents can use to empower their students is role playing. Role playing scenarios can not only help youth know how to react in these situations but can also start a dialogue about what students are seeing in the school. Some things to keep in mind for role playing is to try and stick to incidents that you are seeing or hearing about in the school. You can do this by having students anonymously write scenarios or situations they have seen in the school. Then walk through the best responses to these situations and discuss the power of a bystander.

Another action to take is to keep dialogue open with students. Ask students open-ended questions about bullying and talk through possible ways to address what they are seeing. Ask students their thoughts on what can be done to encourage kindness, create friendships and build community. It is also important in these discussions to define and identify some of the bully's actions that they have seen but may not be sure is bullying. Some students, like elementary students, may not be aware that what they are doing is bullying.

Some key actions students can take to help the victim of bullying when they see it happening are: Not laughing; not encouraging, ignoring or participating in the bully's behavior; not becoming an audience for the bully; supporting the victim, even if it is in private; inviting those being isolated to eat with you at lunch or involved in your friend group's activities; and lastly, and most importantly, telling an adult.

Being an upstander takes courage, action, assertiveness, compassion and leadership. Encourage students who are not comfortable taking action in front of everyone, or are worried about retaliation, to leave the situation and go tell an adult about what is happening. This way the adult can intervene and the student can stay anonymous. Encouraging anonymity for some students can be a powerful tool and help them feel more comfortable coming forward. There is strength in numbers and when one student stands up to bullying, others will follow. All it takes is one student and ten seconds to end a bullying situation. Let's create upstanders, not bystanders!

## **References**

*Stop Bullying*

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/>

*8 Things Kids Should Do When They See Bullying*

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/what-kids-should-do-when-they-witness-bullying-460686>

*Back to School: Empowering Bystanders in the Face of Bullying*

<https://today.uconn.edu/2016/09/back-school-empowering-bystanders-face-bullying/>

*Three Strategies You Can Use to Help Empower Bystanders and Stop Bullying on your Campus*

<https://www.21daykindnesschallenge.org/blog/three-strategies-you-can-use-to-help-empower-bystanders-and-stop-bullying-on-your-campus>

*Try This: Empowering Bystanders to Intervene*

[https://www.yoomagazine.net/images/issue1001/try\\_this\\_13\\_empowering\\_bystanders\\_to\\_intervene\\_2017.pdf](https://www.yoomagazine.net/images/issue1001/try_this_13_empowering_bystanders_to_intervene_2017.pdf)

*Bullying Prevention: How to Empower Bystanders to Act*

<https://www.pathways2wellness.com/notes-from-p2w/2019/8/23/bullying-prevention-how-to-empower-bystanders-to-act>

*Bullying Bystanders...Become Upstanders*

<https://www.stompoutbullying.org/bullying-bystanders-become-upstanders>

*Bystanders: Turning Onlookers into Bully-Prevention Agents*

<https://www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-interventions/bully-prevention/bystanders-turning-onlookers-bully-prevention-agents>

*Cyberbystanders: Understanding the Role of Bystanders in Cyberbullying*

<https://blogs.cornell.edu/sharesome/2015/10/20/cyberbystanders/>

*Empower the Bystanders to Stop the Cyberbullying*

<https://www.theintelligencer.net/life/columns/2015/09/empower-the-bystanders-to-stop-the-cyberbullying/>

*17 Ways to Prevent Bullying in Your Classroom*

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/ways-prevent-bullying-in-classroom-460756>



Winter break meshed in with the holidays can bring up feelings of excitement as well as worry for kids. This tends to be exceptionally true for tweens and teens. Elementary age students tend to be caught up in all of the wonder and excitement swirling around winter break and the upcoming holidays, whereas middle and high school students often find themselves “stressed” as they push to complete end-of-semester assignments, study for and take end of semester tests/exams and worry about the time apart from friends.

No matter if the upcoming break and holidays brings wonder or ignites worry, we need to be mindful of the impact it can have on kids.

As we know, winter break, coupled with the holiday season, can significantly alter/impact a kid’s schedule, including activities, sleep, meals and social time. For many kids, they are going from their predictable and generally consistent daily school schedules to having no set schedule or to a schedule that is more like a roller coaster ride with all the ups and downs, turns and zig-zags brought on by holiday season celebration expectations and demands.

Below are some suggestions on what parents can do to make the break and celebrations less chaotic for kids.

- **Have and Stick to Routines.** Have and keep set mealtimes and bedtimes whenever possible. This may sound simple enough but as we all know, the holiday season is full of hustle and bustle and celebrations with lots of different people which makes it easy to cast aside the importance of routines for kids. Having and sticking to a routine often times helps.
- **Give kids, especially tweens and teens, some control over their schedule and activities during the break.** Allow time for teens to socialize and celebrate with friends. Extended time away from friends can be quite stressful and cause a lot of anxiety amongst tweens and teens. You can discuss and negotiate what festivities they can choose to attend and which ones they are expected to attend. Parents may find by doing so, their child is more involved in the family festivities they do take part in.
- **Get kids involved in holiday activities and traditions.** Allow kids to be more involved in holiday preparations, such as planning some of the family centered activities, shopping, decorating inside and outside and/or cooking. This not only allows kids to feel more connected to what is going on around them, but it also takes some of the holiday pressure and stress off parents/adults during this time of year.
- **Monitor social media and screen time.** Like most things, too much of anything can be unhealthy. Time spent on social media or playing video games is certainly no exception. As we already know, extended video gaming can lead to irritability, lack of sleep and can cause sensory overload. Social media can inadvertently set kids up to compare their holiday celebrations and winter break experiences to their peers which may look more spectacular than theirs and leave them feeling down.
- **Make room for down time/relaxation.** We all need time to just decompress, relax and refuel, kids and adults alike.
- **Pay attention to their mood.** Holidays are a mix of joy and sadness. While it's a time to celebrate, remember kids, just like adults, often reflect and think about those that are no longer in their lives because they moved, changed friends or have died. Check in with your kids to make sure they are doing okay and enjoying their break. If you become concerned that your child might be struggling emotionally, don't be afraid to reach out for some additional support services. You can go online to find out more about what kind of support and behavioral health services there are in your community or you can go to our SCIP webpage [www.scipnebraska](http://www.scipnebraska) for more information and resources.

<https://www.mghclaycenter.org>

<https://kidshealth.org> › teens › holiday-tips

<https://www.raisingarizonakids.com> › Articles



Kids experience a lot of different emotions when it comes to going back to school after a break, ranging from feeling really excited and eager to worried, anxious and even fearful. Below are some suggestions for parents and teachers on helping kids transition back to school:

- **Prepare kids for their return to school:**  
Don't let the end of the holidays and winter break creep up on you or your kids! Remind kids that school will be starting back soon. Mention the positive things about school they like and miss such as their friends or classes/subjects they like/love. Helping them get excited about getting back to school will certainly make the transition easier for all involved.

## **Parents/Caregivers:**

- **Get Back into a Normal Routine:**

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Ideally, it is best to maintain your normal daily routine, even during the break. Unfortunately, for many of us, this isn't often practical as we do have to adjust our routines to accommodate the holidays and the festivities surrounding them.

- Kids often look to us as an example, whether they admit it or not. So as hard as it may be, getting back into a regular routine where you get up at your normal time and get everyone up, dressed and ready for the day a few days before the break is over will make it much easier to get kids on board and back into their normal school week routine. Having breakfast and lunch at the same time during the day as they would at school or as close to it as possible is also very helpful, especially for younger school aged kids.
- Enough rest and sleep. It's easy and quite common to change and break the bedtime routine and overall sleep schedule during this time of year. Get back to your kid's normal school day sleep and wake time schedules a few days before they actually return to school.

## **Teachers/Administrators**

- **Goal Setting/New Year Resolution:**

Engage and encourage students to participate in meaningful goal setting for themselves with their interests as well as their academics now that the new year has begun. Frame it as one of their New Year Resolutions.

- Set timelines for smaller goals that lead to completing their overall goal. Just like adults, when kids see some progress towards the goals they set, they are more likely to continue working toward that goal.
- Recognize and/or celebrate the completion of smaller goals. Often times, the overall goals take a lot of time to complete and recognizing progress helps kids remain focused and motivated in their overall goal.

- **Acknowledge an Extended Break Just Happened:**

Allow some adjustment, processing and socialization time for students when they return.

- Like most adults, it takes time, especially for kids, to readjust back into routines.

- Avoid lots of homework the first week back. While teachers and administrators often feel the pressure to get through lessons and the curriculum by the end of the year or by standardized testing time, having heavy school workloads, especially after an extended break, can backfire. Lighter and more enjoyable homework the first week back helps kids get back into the groove of school and often times helps them adjust more easily.
  
- Be Observant of Student Behaviors:
  - As always, pay attention and distinguish between students who just need a little time to get back in the routine of school and those who might be struggling with sadness/depression or other mental health issues. If you are concerned about a student who might be struggling emotionally, seek out and make a referral to your SCIP team and/or talk with your school social worker or counselor.
  
  - For more information about SCIP in your school, contact your school team leader or visit our website at [www.scipnebraska.com](http://www.scipnebraska.com).

<https://www.giftedguru.com> › back-to-school-after-a-va...

<https://study.com> › blog › how-to-re-engage-students-a...