

The FDA Calls Youth Vaping an Epidemic

The head of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Commissioner Scott Gottlieb is now calling youth vaping an "epidemic."

Dr. William Tillis, an OSF HealthCare Pulmonologist, agrees.

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Dr. William Tillis, OSF HealthCare Pulmonologist

"There actually has been a decrease in smoking amongst young teenagers which is great, but that is because there has been a huge surge, like four times increase in the amount of vaping which far out does any amount of smoking that was done out there, so it's becoming more and more popular with kids today and I think that going to be a real problem moving forward."

More and more young people are "lighting up" with electronic cigarettes. Also called vaping, the use of e-cigarettes provides nicotine without all the smoke.

According to the [2017 National Youth Tobacco Survey](#), nearly 12 percent of high school students and three percent of middle school students used a vaping device in the past 30 days.

Because of the dramatic increase, the FDA is threatening action against the major manufactures of e-cigarettes. The manufacturers have 60 days to submit their plans to prevent youth vaping. The FDA says if it's not satisfied with those plans, it could take their products off the market.

On the surface, e-cigarettes may seem safer than other forms of smoking. Users don't inhale burning tobacco and its many toxic byproducts. These include tar and other carcinogens. But according to Dr. Tillis, they may still be exposing themselves to other harmful substances.

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"There are other chemicals within the vaping solution, and some of these chemicals are quite alarming. Some of them are carcinogens, some of them can cause a reaction in the lungs that we see with other chemicals that can cause serious lung disease."

The inhaled vapor may contain chemicals like formaldehyde. Flavorings may also hide possible toxins. It's also unclear if the vapor puffed into the air puts nonsmokers at risk for health problems.

More research is needed to see how harmful e-cigarettes may be. But it is clear that users are still taking in nicotine— a very addictive substance.

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"Much of it contains nicotine, and so if it contains nicotine it's an addicting substance and people become addicted to vaping and create a habit to that."

At high doses, nicotine can cause dizziness and vomiting. Users who refill their own cartridges are especially at risk for unsafe levels of the drug. Even more concerning, young children have been poisoned after coming in contact with the nicotine-containing liquid. Teens who use e-cigarettes may

become addicted to nicotine, which can harm their developing brain. They may also start smoking regular cigarettes.

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“Young teenagers don’t really think about the long term effects of those things, so it’s very difficult. I think they need to know that it is dangerous, it is addicting, and it can cause long term problems. It’s certainly not safe.”

Parents need to talk to their kids about the dangers of e-cigarettes and vaping. According to Dr. Tillis, simply starting the conversation is a necessary step to pave the way for a smoke-free future.

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“Overall there has been a decrease in the amount of cigarette smoking that’s there, but that word has not been out about vaping. So we really need to start at a very young age that vaping is dangerous and that’s not something we should be doing. And hopefully more parents will get on top of that.”