

Script – Print - E-cig Education

OSF joins battle in curbing vaping among teens

It began with one invitation from a school seeking to provide their students a medical perspective to the dangers of using E-cigarettes, or vaping. Now, Jennifer Kelsey, Pediatric Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) with OSF Medical Group -Ottawa, is bringing that message to numerous middle and high schools in the LaSalle County area.

Recently, she spoke to students at Washington Junior High in Oglesby.

Principal Merritt Burns says Washington began to proactively address the issue at the start of the school year when they began to see a concerning uptick in vaping among its student - some in 6th grade.

Burns believes having a medical professional from OSF reinforce their efforts adds more weight to the issue.

"It's one thing for us to talk to the kids," says Merritt Burns, Principal at Washington Middle School. "At some point, I feel, we all fall on deaf ears. So, to have an outside agency to come in to preach that same message, we were thrilled to have OSF come and just reinforce some of the things we were saying."

A recent study, sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, found the number of high school vapers rose by 1-point-3 million from 2017 to 2018.

Administrators at all the schools Kelsey has made her presentation say they're seeing increases in vaping use. That coincides with what she is seeing among her pediatric patients.

"Definitely a huge problem, especially in the younger kids," says Jennifer Kelsey, Pediatric Advanced Practice Registered Nurse at OSF Medical Group – Ottawa. "And we're surprised at how young they are starting to vape. As early as 5th and 6th graders have tried it."

Like many habits adopted by adolescents and teens, Kelsey says curiosity, peer pressure and experimentation are at the core of the increase in vaping. She also says the e-cigarette flavors are attractive and geared to kids, plus there's the misconception that it's safer than regular cigarettes.

"We walk a lot about how vaping is kind of a new and upcoming trend," says Jennifer Kelsey, Pediatric Advanced Practice Registered Nurse at OSF Medical Group – Ottawa. "And there hasn't been a lot a research and science of like what the long term side-effects on their body will be. But I do talk a lot about the chemicals that are in the vaping that we do know the side-effects of those chemicals."

Kelsey says students often come away shocked by what she tells them - particularly that one of the chemicals in e-cigarettes is formaldehyde, used to preserve dead bodies.

Additionally, Burns says the students come away enlightened and he's already seeing a positive effect.

"They've reacted positively as to what they are now knowing or what they are seeing, where they're getting things," says Merritt Burns, Principal at Washington Middle School. "They're more pro-active in their conversations to me, if they hear about kids that might be doing it or might be selling it. So overall, it's just generated conversation as opposed to just kicking it under the table."

Both Burns and Kelsey, however, know that this is not a "one-shot" deal. That the education and messaging needs to continue, even if it takes convincing one student at a time.