TuSalud

Teens' E-Cigarette Use Is a Public Health Challenge

Concerns that vaping poses a particularly deadly threat to Latino and other young people of color prompt advocates to act.

October 8, 2021 By Jeanette L. Pinnace

Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a statement noting that 80% of e-cigarette users ages 12 through 17 vape flavored products. The practice has become a big enough concern that a number of public health organizations have launched campaigns to address the risks vaping products pose to young people, especially those from vulnerable Latino and African-American communities, which suffer from health disparities, reports Salud America!

The account cited results from a recent survey published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the FDA showing that a disturbing number of middle schoolers and high schoolers vape e-cigarettes daily.

For the investigation, CDC and FDA researchers reviewed nationally representative data on 20,413 young people in grades 6 through 8 and grades 9 through 12 from the 2021 National Youth Tobacco Survey. Scientists collected information about how often individuals vaped e-cigs and the type of device, flavors and brands used. (The survey was conducted remotely due to the pandemic.)

The study showed that 2.8% (320,000) of middle schoolers and 11.3% (1.72 million) of high schoolers used e-cigarettes. Both groups of students preferred disposable devices and fruit-flavored e-cigs, followed by other sweet-tasting varieties and then mint and menthol. The most popular brands were Puff Bar, SMOK, JUUL and Suorin.

"As kids return to school, we face the real risk of a resurgence of the youth e-cigarette epidemic unless the FDA quickly eliminates all flavored e-cigarettes. With 85% of youth e-cigarette users using flavors, our kids will remain in jeopardy as long as any flavored products remain on the market," said Matthew Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, to CNN in a statement.

Myers's organization and others like it have launched various antismoking campaigns to raise awareness among young people of the negative health effects of e-cigarettes. A number of these strategies have been produced in both Spanish and English, including the CDC's "Protecting Young

People from E-Cigarettes," "The Tobacco-Free Schools Initiative," by a coalition of health groups and the FDA's "Real Cost" campaign, specifically targeting Latinos.

According to the CDC, since 2014, e-cigarettes are the tobacco product most frequently used by American youth. The situation is of special concern to the agency because of findings that show most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which can harm brain development in adolescents.

Health organizations viewed the FDA's ban on flavored e-cigarettes and other tobacco products as a positive step toward addressing this problem. However, others remain concerned that the agency isn't moving quickly enough to regulate the e-cig industry.

The tobacco industry's attempts to position e-cigarettes as part of the public health solution to end smoking is a prime example of tactics used to confuse kids and other consumers, stresses a report by the Truth Initiative. (The group is the nation's largest nonprofit public health organization dedicated to eliminating tobacco use and addiction.) Its investigation showed that "while young people overwhelmingly see through Big Tobacco and its attempts to lure them in, they are using tobacco at rates unseen in years," according to the report.

"Brands such as Vuse have seen skyrocketing sales making them the number two choice among youth and yet remain illegally on the market due to FDA inaction," observed the organization. "The number one brand used by youth, Puff Bar, not only comes in a wide variety of flavors but has also recently indicated that it will now be manufactured with synthetic nicotine in a brazen attempt to thwart FDA oversight."

To learn more about e-cigarettes, read "E-Cigarettes Do Not Help People Quit Smoking."

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