

Dangers of teen vaping topic of Portsmouth forum

Use of e-cigarettes sharply on the rise, parents told



Heidi Driscoll, coordinator for the South Kingstown Prevention Partnership, displays an e-cigarette product designed to look just like a pack of regular cigarettes.

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"This is some of the scariest stuff I've seen."

PORTSMOUTH SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER SCOTT SULLIVAN

THE DIFFERENT WAYS TO VAPE

Youngster who vape have no shortage of products to choose from, and they come in three basic categories, according to Heidi Driscoll, coordinator for the South Kingstown Prevention Partnership.

E-cigarettes

E-cigs are relatively inexpensive (\$10) and come in both disposable and reusable form. Some are rechargeable — users can plug them into a computer using a USB cord — and have flavored cartridges.

There are also e-cigars, e-hookahs and e-shishas. Some of the elaborate design schemes make it clear that the manufacturers are targeting youngsters, say critics.

Vaporizers

These do the best job in concealing both the products with which you fill them — called "e-liquids" — as well as the odor they produce.

Ms. Driscoll displayed one she bought on Amazon for \$20. "This opens up and you would add an e-juice or nicotine oil to this. You pump it up, heat it up and you would vape it," she said.

Vaporizers come in all different sizes and shapes and are also rechargeable. One looks like box of mints, another resembles a can of Guinness beer.

Ms. Driscoll said vaporizers can be easily purchased online by underage youth. Amazon asks shoppers if they are 18 or older before buying the product, but no proof is necessary, she said.

"It's extremely easy. We actually had someone tell us that they have a child who is purchasing on the internet and selling them in schools. He's making money off of it," she said.

Heat-not-burn

These are products that heat actual tobacco instead of liquid nicotine. They include dry vaporizers and "pods."

"There's no lighting or flame to any of this. The battery heats up the product. Without burning the product, you don't get an odor anymore," said Ms. Driscoll.

They're cheap, highly available, come in youth-appealing flavors, colors and designs, and are made to conceal use. One of them which Ms. Driscoll brought along looks just like an Albuterol inhaler.

Jim McGaw

PORTSMOUTH — A teacher at Portsmouth High School recently told School Resource Officer Scott Sullivan about a strange odor emanating from inside a classroom: It smelled like cotton candy.

"I can guarantee you no one's making cotton candy in your room," said Officer Sullivan.

A more likely explanation for the smell, he said, was a scourge that's on a sharp rise in middle and high schools: Vaping, which was the topic of a forum hosted by the Portsmouth Prevention Coalition Wednesday night at the middle school.

It was the first of three such presentations being hosted by local drug prevention coalitions. The next two will be held at 6 p.m. on Thursday, April 21, at Tiverton Middle School; and 6:30 p.m. Monday, April 25, at the Little Compton Community Center.

Fewer than 30 people attended the presentation, but they received an earful about the rising dangers of vaping, in which nicotine and other drugs are ingested by electronic delivery.

The main speaker for the forum was Heidi Driscoll, coordinator for the South Kingstown Prevention Partnership. She started her presentation holding what appeared to be a pen, but was in fact an e-cigarette. That's no accident, since such devices are designed to avoid detection, she said.

And that goes for the smell as well, since their batteries don't burn tobacco but rather nicotine. "We started seeing a trend where tobacco use is going down, which is great," said Ms. Driscoll. "But we saw (another trend) with vaping and e-cigarettes. No one, including myself, knew what these things were. But you talk to the kids and they knew."

The growth in popularity of these products has been alarming, she said. The e-cigarette market went from \$500 million in 2012 to \$1.7 billion in 2013.

“Electronic cigarette use among young people has officially surpassed traditional cigarette use. One in seven high school students has tried vaping, according to Yale University,” she said.

According to the federal [Centers of Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), 1.5 percent of high school students vaped over a 30-day period in 2012, said Ms. Driscoll. However, that number jumped to 4.5 percent in 2013 and to 13.4 percent in 2014, she said, adding there’s been a strong uptick in middle school use as well. And it’s only going to get worse, she said.

“You’re going to see these numbers significantly increase,” said Ms. Driscoll.

‘Highly addictive’

Developed in China by a pharmacist who was trying to help his sick father kick his cigarette habit, e-cigs were introduced in the United States in 2006-2007 and quickly became trendy among underage consumers. Now manufacturers are marketing these products toward youths, even though you still must be at least 18 to legally purchase them, she said.

Ads for vaporizers pop up far more often on children’s social media than for adults, their packaging features youth-oriented designs and they come in many different flavors — hence the cotton candy smell.

Vaporizers have not yet been regulated by the federal government, Ms. Driscoll said. “It’s the wild west,” she said.

While these products don’t contain tobacco — although one is now in the works — most of them do burn nicotine which is carcinogenic and highly addictive, Ms. Driscoll said.

Not your grandfather’s pot

Furthermore, some kids are also using vaporizers to smoke a far more potent type of marijuana than what was available in the ’70s and ’80s, said Ms. Driscoll.

“The product is marijuana butane hash oil, or dabs,” she said, noting that some users call it wax or honey, the latter of which it resembles.

She and Officer Sullivan said the levels of tetrahydrocannabinol or THC (the chemical responsible for most of marijuana’s psychological effects) that are found in these products have reached as high as 90 percent, compared to 1 to 5 percent of yesteryear.

“They are knocking our kids off their feet,” Ms. Driscoll said.

Marijuana is more addictive when vaped, said Officer Sullivan, adding that it can lead to psychotic breaks and hallucinations, while poorly grown pot can cause high levels of ammonia when vaped.

“This is some of the scariest stuff I’ve seen,” he said, adding that vaporizers often contain toxic chemicals. “There are no studies that are going to tell you this is better than smoking. There are no studies on the longterm effects because they haven’t been around that long.”

‘Changing every day’

It’s difficult to keep up with the different products available (see related) story because vaping “is changing every day,” said Officer Sullivan.

Ms. Driscoll held up a large, silver vaporizer that was recently confiscated at a high school.

“The parents were extremely upset,” she said. “Not because their child was using it, but because the (school resource officer) was keeping it. This costs over \$200.”

Other products can easily be concealed. Officer Sullivan said students have been known to vape right at their desk during class without detection.

Both speakers urged parents to educate themselves about vaping, talk to their children about the trend and, if needed, to search their rooms or cars if they suspect something's amiss.

Here are some signs that your child may be vaping, according to Ms. Driscoll:

- Sweet smells — when no candy is around — can be a sign that someone was just vaping. “It’s not going to smell like tobacco,” she said.
- “Pens” that aren’t pens. Some e-cigs also look like highlighters.
- You child is sipping copious amounts of liquids. Vaping products can cause chronic dry mouth, she said.
- Nose bleeds. Vaporizers can dry out nasal passages.
- Passing on caffeine. Some e-cig users develop a sensitivity to caffeine.