

VAPING: Sisters is seeing uptick in use of nicotine product

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is focused primarily on nicotine use.

Young people of Sisters have clearly gotten swept up in this wave, and the issue is becoming a public-health concern since many Americans believe that the use of e-cigarettes is harmless.

Sisters Middle School and Sisters High School (SHS) administrators have noticed a definite uptick in vaping over the past year. Anonymous reporting through surveys indicates that 46 percent of students responding in grade 9 and 30 percent in grade 11 have tried vaping.

This makes it likely that a good number of students are vaping regularly. Both schools have stepped up efforts for prevention, detection, and intervention.

“We’re seeing use across the board among our students, from athletes, non-athletes, freshmen to seniors — there is no particular group or pattern,” said SHS Principal Joe Hosang.

The U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams made a nationwide appeal last month, offering a report heavy with warnings about the dangers of vaping among teenagers. In bold, his messages states, “We must take action now to protect the health of our nation’s young people and protect them from a lifetime of nicotine addiction and associated health risks.”

Concerns about using e-cigarettes for vaping centers around the dangers to the body and brains of young people. Nicotine exposure in people under 25, while the brain is still developing, can impact learning, due to changes in memory and attention. The aerosol can introduce the user and others around them to harmful substances that include ultrafine particles, which can damage the lungs, as well as heavy metals and volatile organic compounds that are known to be unhealthy.

One of the main concerns about vaping has to do with the concentration of nicotine involved. One Juul cartridge or “pod” can contain up to the equivalent of 20 conventional cigarettes. The Surgeon General’s report indicates that as many as 67 percent of users between the ages of 15-24 don’t fully understand that Juuls contain nicotine at all. Given that nicotine is one of the five most addictive substances known in America, there is a clear and present danger of young people quickly becoming dependent on the substance.

The creation of e-cigarette technology relies on the marketing of the devices as being significantly safer than regular cigarettes. There is some truth to this claim in that tar and other carcinogenic byproducts are not present. However, Juul and other manufacturers are now backpedaling, insisting that their entire reason for existence is to help smokers of traditional combustible cigarettes switch over to e-cigarettes. Their latest marketing comes after years of ads that were filled with images of young people using the product. The Instagram and Facebook pages of the company were recently pulled after nationwide complaints of the targeting of young people.

One of the struggles for parents, teachers, and coaches who care about young people being involved in vaping is that the practice is easy to hide. Absent is the unmistakable odor of regular cigarettes and the accompanying bad breath and residual smell on clothes and upholstery. There is no real smell at all or a fruity scent. Gone is the crumpled package found in the bottom of a garbage can, replaced by a device that looks like a functioning USB drive or another metallic

gadget easily hidden in the palm of the hand or the corner of a pocket.

Sisters High School students identify three main reasons for vaping:

1. It seems cool, “sexy,” and a way to feel accepted. There is a sense that “everyone’s doing it.”

2. It’s exciting to do something that’s a little risky and that’s easy to get away with.

3. It makes them feel good and it alleviates stress.

Many students truly don’t see vaping as problematic, other than they know their parents and school people don’t agree and that they might get in trouble if caught.

Sisters High School health teacher Heather Johnson is passionate about quelling the vaping epidemic and is working to help educate students and parents.

“I believe the key is prevention,” she says. “If we can influence our youth to never *try* vaping, they have an exceptional opportunity to avoid nicotine throughout their lifetime. When students are first exposed to nicotine, their brain falls in love with this drug and immediately creates nicotine receptors. Think of nicotine as a key, and receptors as little locks. When the nicotine unlocks

the nicotine receptor, a feel-good chemical called dopamine is released, giving you a little ‘hit’ or ‘buzz.’ This doesn’t last long. The nicotine soon fades, making the receptor eager for more. Addiction is born.

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“Another way to mitigate this epidemic is through positive peer pressure — students supporting an environment of not tolerating any drug use. We are working to maintain an environment where students care and connect with each other and truly help one another access trusted adults and other resources that can help.”

TICKETS: Show is slated for Tuesday, January 29

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appetizers and desserts served by Sisters High School culinary arts students and a silent auction. The concert begins at 7:30 p.m. with the two musical legends sharing the stage for a performance showcasing their songs and the stories and inspirations behind them.

Starry Nights events have raised over \$1.3 million in net proceeds for the Sisters Schools Foundation since its inception in 1997. Among the artists who have performed in the series are Vince Gill, Amy Grant, Keb’ Mo,’ Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Kenny Loggins, Michael McDonald, Karla Bonoff, Kim Carnes, Rodney Crowell, Hal Ketchum, Lee Ann Womack and Christopher Cross. “An Acoustic Evening with Lyle Lovett and John Hiatt” marks a special return to Sisters for both artists — Hiatt last appeared at Starry Nights in 2005, and Lovett performed at the event with his ensemble in 2006.

For more information visit www.sistersstarrynights.org.

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