

Exploring health risks related to vaping, e-cigarettes

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A new trend has risen among teens and young adults taking the place of smoking cigarettes known as vaping. Vaping, is the act of inhaling and exhaling the vapor produced by an electronic cigarette.

Sophomore Aaron Meece said he has been vaping for about five years. “I only started vaping as a way to kick smoking regular cigarettes, but I just never stopped,” Meece said.

Meece said he vapes every single day and usually always has the vape with him. For him, trying to break one addiction spawned another.

Vaping or the use of electronic cigarettes is marketed as a safe alternative to cigarettes. The product first became popular in the mid 2000s when the idea of a smokeless non-tobacco cigarette caught the attention of consumers. Vapes can hold either water flavored with chemicals and artificial sweeteners or tobacco made for vapes. Although the vapor that comes from e-cigarettes is technically not smoke, it is still harmful to the body and for those around the user to inhale.

Many college students have begun vaping recreationally. For as long as smoking has been popular there are always those users who claim themselves as “social smokers” only. The issue with social smoking is that in small spaces like parties or bars, the secondhand smoke becomes unavoidable.

Even though vapes don't always have tobacco in them, even flavored water vapor becomes a carcinogen when mixed with carbon monoxide as the user exhales.

Wayne Bell, asthma and lung specialist from the Bowling Green Family Health Center has been trying to explain this to his patients for years. "E-cigarettes have been marketed as a safe alternative to smoking, when in reality it has always been a danger," Bell said. "All we know is the fact that putting any sort of chemical in your lungs at any age is always going to cause health issues."

According to a study conducted by New York University's school of medicine, vaping can be linked to heart disease and cancer. The study shows the risks may also apply to secondhand smoke. This was concluded through exposing lab mice to electronic cigarette vapor for 12 weeks. The dose of nicotine exposure was equivalent to 10 years of light e-cigarette smoking in humans.

The study also found that e-cigarettes can cause DNA damage and reduced repair activity in the lungs, bladder and heart-- each of which increase the chance of cancer and heart disease in a user.

As for why so many young people have taken to the habit, Bell thinks stress is to blame. "People feel they have to do something to relax, especially with all the stress the younger generations are under. Student loan bills and having to find a job soon are stressful situations to deal with at such a young age," he said.

Although many users are aware of the health risks associated with activities such as vaping, they continue anyway. "Honestly I like using a vape because it looks cool, and it's something else to look forward to when I go out," said Morgan Normant, a native to the Cleveland area club scene. "It's just another activity now that I associate with a party. I know it's not good for me, but I haven't had a negative experience from it yet; so as bad as this sounds, I'm not that concerned."