E-Cigarettes and Vaping- Are they Safe Alternatives to Smoking for your Teen?

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The Wellness Committee has been reviewing the Youth Risk Behavior Survey results. We have noted that, though smoking numbers are decreasing among our teens, the numbers of students who are using electronic cigarettes and vape pens has increased. We are concerned about this rise because these devices are not considered safe alternatives to smoking, and neither are they considered an effective way to quit smoking.

Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) include electronic cigarettes and vapes. They have been around for over 10 years, and have often been seen as a safer alternative to cigarette smoking and as relatively harmless. But are they safe? As the number of teens using ENDS rises rapidly (more than 3 million middle and high schoolers used them in 2015), should we be concerned about them?

Let’s look at some of the facts.

**Nicotine:** E-cigarettes deliver nicotine, along with water vapor and flavoring. Vapes often deliver nicotine, but can also deliver things like chemicals from marijuana. Nicotine is highly addictive. In fact it has been shown to be more addictive than heroin and cocaine. There is evidence that nicotine can harm the developing adolescent brain.

**Flavoring:** ENDS may contain flavorings like ice cream and bubble gum. These flavors not only sound harmless, but they also target young people. The multitude of flavorings used in these devices contain chemicals which have been shown to be irritating to the lungs when inhaled and can make asthma worse. Some of the chemicals have been shown to cause a lung condition called “popcorn lung”.

**Smoking Alternative:** Research has shown that teens who use ENDS are more likely to become cigarette smokers. The nicotine in ENDS can also be a gateway to other drugs for teens. And the few ENDS that do not contain nicotine still contain harmful chemicals that are inhaled into the lungs.

Recent results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey given to Northbridge High School students show that more than 42% have used ENDS. Tobacco and ENDS education is done in health classes, but an honest discussion with a parent is still the most influential thing you can do to help your child avoid the harmful effects of ENDS. The link below has resources including further facts about ENDS, tips for talking to your teen, and a video on the harmful effects of nicotine on the adolescent brain.

https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/about.html