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VAPING: The Epidemic

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**Editor's Note: Names of students have been changed to protect their identity.*

A "fun fad" has quickly developed into a widespread epidemic among teens across the nation. Electronic cigarettes are now the drug that teens run to for a quick nicotine fix or to fit in with the popular social group.

"It's definitely an epidemic among teens today," assistant principal Sid Taylor said.

The use of electronic cigarettes has taken the place of tobacco products for students due to their easy availability, alluring e-liquid flavors and the belief that they are safer and healthier.

Between 2011 and 2017, statistics show that e-cigarette use increased among teens in high school. The 2017 National Youth Tobacco Survey shows that 11.7 percent of high school students used e-cigarettes in the last month, compared with 1.5 percent of high school students who reported current use in 2011.

While gathering statistics, student interviews were taken in which students gave insight into their understanding of electronic cigarettes, as well as their use of them.

"Vape is like a high class cigarette," Craig said.

He admits that a vape makes him

Vaping among teens continues to increase

feel cleaner and safer than smoking a tobacco cigarette.

"Cigarettes stink and their ashes get everywhere. That's why I like JUULs so much," Melanie said.

Craig and Melanie both admit that the lack of smothering smoke lures them to e-cigarettes rather than tobacco cigarettes.

According to students, the leading factor for the purchase of a vape is the peer pressure they receive.

"It was over the summer. Everyone else had one, so I had to see what it was like," Melanie said.

E-cigarettes are more than just a fad for some students and are even said to be beneficial in helping relieve stress.

"It really relieves stress and makes you feel good," Melanie said.

Students are also intrigued by the tricks they are able to do with their JUULs. With the watchful eyes of their friends, students create vapor bubbles and blow smoke rings.

A recent Student Press survey of approximately 150 students at GCHS was taken concerning the use of electronic cigarettes versus tobacco cigarettes among students.

While 41 percent of students smoke a vape, only 16 percent smoke tobacco cigarettes. Out of the 83 students surveyed 59 have used an e-cigarette but never smoked a cigarette.

The majority of these students are underage and cannot purchase an e-cigarette or the pods. This is where older friends become beneficial for teens under the age of 18.

The most common electronic vape used by teens is called a JUUL.

According to Health Science teacher Tabitha Vice, JUULs are designed to be mistaken for pens or USB memory sticks. This allows students to have possession of one at school without getting caught because of its deceiving appearance.

Taylor admits to collecting countless e-cigarettes throughout the current school year.

"I could start a store with all of the vapes I have compensated," Taylor said.

When a student is found with possession of an e-cigarette of any kind, it is immediately confiscated and the student receives three days of out of school suspension.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and can

lead to other tobacco or drug use.

Both admit to being addicted to vaping but for different reasons.

"I can be at work and I just want it," Melanie said. "I guess you could say it's kinda like a smoke break."

While Melanie simply has a longing for her vape, Craig often experiences more severe cravings.

"I know I'm addicted. I can go a day or two without it and I feel like I have a migraine," Craig said.

While the popular belief is that there are few health risks involved in vaping, statistics prove that this belief is untrue.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the use of E-cigarettes exposes the lungs to a variety of chemicals. Some of those chemicals include, those added to e-liquids and various other chemicals produced during the heating/vaporizing process.

One JUUL cartridge is roughly equal to the amount of nicotine in a 20-pack of cigarettes, which is about 200 puffs.

Just a few of long term effects of a vape are lung diseases such as: popcorn lung and wet lung.

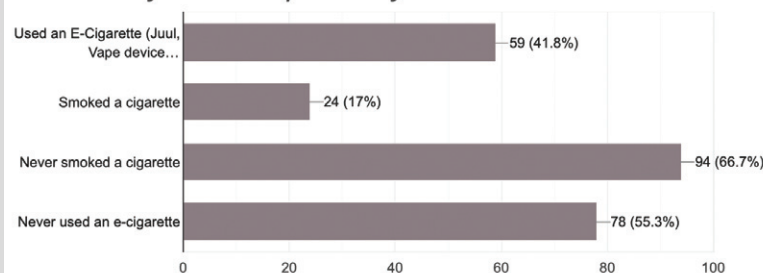
"Using nicotine in adolescence can harm the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood, and impulse control" (CDC).

Therefore, young developing teens are direct targets for brain damage and nicotine addiction.

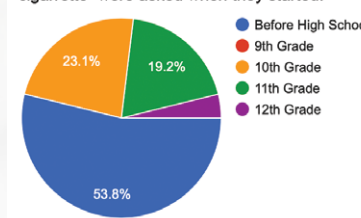
This addiction has proven to lead to more severe drug use in the future. Students need to be made aware of the risks involved in "having a good time" and showing off for friends.

Survey Results:

This survey was completed by 141 GCHS Students



The students who answered yes to "smoked a cigarette" were asked when they started.



The students who answered yes to "used an e-cigarette" were asked when they started.

