

Student hospitalized due to vaping comes forward, urges others to quit

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A record number of vaping-related incidents have occurred at OHS since the new year, all of which took place late January in quick succession. Since that time, the City of Oxford and the Oxford School District have both taken steps to combat the vaping epidemic.

One OHS student who was hospitalized due to vaping has come forward to share his experience and to warn other students about the effects of vaping. The student, who asked to remain anonymous, received the device from a friend. After hitting the vape, he had a reaction to the chemicals it contained.

"So, when I got the device and I hit it, I was like, 'Okay. I know what that is. It's a brand of juice. CBD oil,'" the student said. "I was like, 'Okay, it's a nice little buzz.' Then it started becoming more than a buzz. I had to sit down to catch my breath, and as I was catching my breath, I had to lay down. After that, I just blacked out."

People often mix vape pods, or cartridges that contain nicotine and other chemicals, in order to experience a more powerful buzz when they inhale the vape. Because people share devices, it is difficult for them to know exactly what the vape has in it. Some people can have adverse reactions to certain chemicals that vapes contain. The student believes that the friend who gave him the vape lied about what was in it.

"I believe he does [know what was in it], but it wasn't what he said it was," the student said.

After blacking out, the student began to hallucinate. As he was hallucinating, the student crashed headfirst into a bookshelf in the school library, which resulted in needing staples in the back of his head.

"I still could see the library, but it was distorted. Everything was in different places, and in my mind, I'm in some type of maze. And so I'm trying to get out of it," the student said. "So I'm trying to go left, go right. I was thinking that if I went left, I'd get out. But I already went left. And it just kept playing over in my head."

The student was somewhat aware of his surroundings, but he kept fading in and out of consciousness.

"I think that was when the officers came, and I was on the bean bag, and I remember hearing officer Zach's voice," the student said. "He was like, 'It's okay bud. We're here, just calm down, calm down.' I could hear him, but in my mind, I'm on the bean bag lay-

ing on my stomach, and my head is facing towards the bookshelf, and I didn't know it was a bookshelf. I couldn't tell because it was distorted and messed up, and in my mind, my vision would zoom in on it, and it would go black. It was like I was falling down this pit, this endless black pit. It was like being in a fireless hell, and that kept replaying over in my head, and then I would come back, and I'd hear officer Zach's voice again, and then I'd go right back into the hole, and it just played over and over. After that, I think that's when my mom came, and I could hear her voice, and I remember her putting me in her lap, and she was talking to me. She was like, 'It's okay sweetheart. I'm here, I'm here.' But when I was trying to look at her, I would recognize her shirt, jacket, and right when I got to her chin and her mouth, I would fall back into the hole. I never could see her face, and that just kept replaying over and over. It was hard, I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. That 30 to 45 seconds of that buzz isn't worth your whole life."

Administrators and School Resource Officers (SROs) are the first responders to any medical issues that occur on the OHS campus. OSD Director of Security Sgt. Zach Anderson believes that there has been a noticeable increase in the amount of medical emergencies due to vaping. Since the effects of vaping aren't always immediate, Anderson thinks it is hard for kids to realize how harmful it can be.

"Kids think they're invincible.

They always have," Anderson said. "And because of that, I think it leads [them] into poor decision-making sometimes. Some of the substances that are used in these vapes, you

have no idea where they're being made or who's making them. And when I say it puts you in peril, it truly puts you in peril."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the amount of kids who vape has doubled since 2017. Since talking with other SROs, Anderson has concluded that schools all across America are having to deal with the same problems that OHS is facing.

"I've had Tupelo officers call over here, and they're all seeing the same things," Anderson said. "These kids are hurting themselves. So it's not just localized here. We're seeing it all over. And it's scary. Not necessarily for my sake, I'm scared for [the students] because this isn't normal."

After the string of incidents in January, Anderson put together a public service announcement (PSA) about the risks of vaping. He hopes the PSA will encourage kids to quit before they are fined.

"What I saw scared me. I do not want to do a funeral for a kid. I don't want to be a part of that. So the PSA was birthed out of compassion. I'd rather you stop it than me have to fine you," Anderson said. "Just make the decision to do right, and this would be simple. Do right because doing right is right."

To combat the vaping problem, Oxford lawmakers passed an ordinance on Feb. 19 that bans the sale of vaping products to anyone under the age of 21. Anyone underage that is in possession of a vape is subject to a fine of up to \$100 on their third offense. Anderson thinks that the new law is a step in the right direction.

"[The ordinance] has given us some teeth. I think if we make a decision for zero tolerance, then let's stick by it," Anderson said. "I'm not here to ruin your day, or stop your fun. I'm here to protect you, and that's my job. And sometimes people don't like it when they're protected. At the end of the day, you're going to make your own decision, and I pray you make the right decision. But here, we've got to be able to control the school environment."

Since his experience, the student has quit vaping and urges others to follow suit. According to him, there are many other ways to find happiness in life besides drugs.

"That pleasure, that high feeling that you get from it, you can find that in other stuff. It's not worth it," the student said. "It's not worth putting your life on the line for those few seconds."

