

Clinicians need to screen 'nicotine naive' teenagers for vaping, says addictions expert

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Nancy Campbell-Heider, PhD, associate professor and chair of the Department of Family, Community and Health System Sciences in the University at Buffalo

School of Nursing. Credit: Kate Melton

During a checkup, physicians and nurses often ask about drinking habits, safe sex practice or cigarette use. Vaping is rarely mentioned.

This discussion is urgently needed with teen patients, who are either uninformed or misinformed about the dangers and risks associated with [electronic cigarettes](#), says Nancy Campbell-Heider, PhD, a University at Buffalo addictions and high-risk adolescent behavior expert.

In the review, "Teen Use of Electronic Cigarettes," published in the *Journal of Addictions Nursing*, Campbell-Heider calls on [health care professionals](#) to place this form of [nicotine delivery](#) on their radar when seeing young patients.

By screening early for at-risk behaviors, clinicians can stage interventions before vaping leads to the use of other [tobacco products](#).

"Teens are ignorant of the risk of using e-cigarettes, so it has become their new drug of choice," says Campbell-Heider, associate professor and chair of the Department of Family, Community and Health System Sciences in the UB School of Nursing.

"Vaping is a dangerous drug since you are inhaling nicotine, which is highly addictive and a gateway to other drugs and combustible cigarette use. This is not a safe alternative to smoking."

The research review, conducted with Diane Snow, PhD, retired clinical professor of nursing at University of Texas at Arlington, was inspired after Campbell-Heider learned that her 17-year-old grandson was caught with vaping equipment in school.

Her grandson refuses to eat a McDonald's hamburger because he thinks they are unhealthy. And he wouldn't touch a cigarette if his life depended on it. But much to Campbell-Heider's shock, he believed e-cigarettes were harmless.

The reason: his friends and the internet told him so, she says.

New U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulations will better control the products availability to teens, says Campbell-Heider. But as long as clinicians and parents continue to believe the products are safe, adolescents will remain at risk.

While e-cigarettes don't contain the harmful tars found in cigarettes, the devices still contain harmful diluents and nicotine, a substance more addictive than heroin, she says.

"Nicotine is more harmful to the teenage brain because it is still developing," says Campbell-Heider. "Teens are also more prone to severe addiction than adults. That's why getting them to not experiment with drugs is so important."

Ninety percent of adults who are addicted to cigarettes or other drugs began using them as a teenager, she adds.

A recent study, cited in her review, found that teens using e-cigarettes were more likely to use combustible tobacco products than teens who didn't vape.

Another study found that diluents and byproducts in e-cigarettes could potentially harm the respiratory tract and increase breathing problems among users by 30 percent compared to non-users.

Research also discovered that [high school students](#) who use e-cigarettes

are 27 times more likely to vaporize cannabis.

"The general population knows smoking is dangerous," says Campbell-Heider. "The [general population](#) does not know that vaping is dangerous."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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