

Study finds vaping prevention program significantly reduces use in middle school students

January 30 2020, by Wendi Hawthorne

In response to the youth vaping crisis, experts at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) developed CATCH My Breath, a program to prevent electronic cigarette use among fifth—12th grade students. Research published in *Public Health Reports* reveals the program significantly reduces the likelihood of e-cigarette use among students who complete the curriculum.

Since a 2018 declaration citing the vaping crisis a public health epidemic, the number of [middle school students](#) who use e-cigarettes has more than doubled. According to 2019 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 10 middle [school](#) students reported using e-cigarettes in the last 30 days. This marks a troubling trend with dangerous consequences, as 60 deaths in the U.S. have been linked to lung injury associated with vaping product use.

The research collected from the program's [pilot study](#) found that students in schools that received the CATCH My Breath program were half as likely to experiment with e-cigarettes compared with those in schools that did not receive the program.

According to the research team, CATCH My Breath is the only evidence-based [e-cigarette](#) prevention program that has demonstrated effectiveness for middle school-aged youth. While the program focuses primarily on vaping, it also educates students to resist other forms of

tobacco. Research has shown that around 40% of youth tobacco users reported using more than one tobacco product.

"This program was created to address the youth vaping crisis and to reverse the growing trend of e-cigarette use among adolescents," said Steven H. Kelder, Ph.D., MPH, Beth Toby Grossman Distinguished Professor in Spirituality and Healing at UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin and the study's lead author. "Most children are using JUUL devices, which has the nicotine equivalent of 20 cigarettes for one pod. Many do not know there is nicotine in these devices, much less such a high level. This is why it is urgent to educate schools, families, and kids."

Experts at UTHealth School of Public Health who developed the program received input from school administrators, health education coordinators, and tobacco prevention educators, as well as teachers, students, and parents.

The curriculum emphasizes active, [student](#)-centered learning through group discussions, goal setting, refusal skills training, capacity building with analyzing tobacco company advertising, and creating counter-advertising and non-smoking policies. The program is disseminated by the nonprofit CATCH Global Foundation and has been implemented in over 2,000 schools across all 50 states.

"We designed CATCH My Breath to be easy for teachers to implement in their classrooms. All program materials are available online and are age-appropriate for middle and high school students," said Kelder, who developed the program as part of his ongoing research at the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living at UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin.

The research team was recently awarded a \$3.1 million grant from the

National Institutes of Health to conduct a long-term assessment of the program, a first-of-its-kind study on a nationwide nicotine vaping prevention program. Through this large-scale study, the research team will add a parent component to the CATCH My Breath [program](#) to further enhance support for e-cigarette prevention.

"CATCH My Breath offers theory- and practice-informed strategies for parents to understand the [vaping](#) epidemic and how to talk to their children as well," said Andrew Springer, DrPH, an associate professor at UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin and co-investigator of the CATCH My Breath study.

More information: Steven H. Kelder et al, A Middle School Program to Prevent E-Cigarette Use: A Pilot Study of "CATCH My Breath", *Public Health Reports* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0033354919900887](https://doi.org/10.1177/0033354919900887)

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