

Would these new proposals help keep e-cigarettes away from Kentucky kids?

13 December 2018, by Valarie Honeycutt Spears



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Would prohibiting the sale of flavored liquids for e-cigarettes help curb the onslaught of addiction among Kentucky teens? What about raising the minimum age for purchase from 18 to 21?

At a conference on e-cigarettes use among teens recently in Louisville, officials from the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky and Kentucky Youth Advocates recommended four main policy changes that could be addressed by legislation in the 2019 General Assembly.

- Including e-cigarettes in all local smoke-free ordinances and tobacco-free school policies. Only 52 Kentucky school districts—less than half—include e-cigarettes in their tobacco-free policies.

- Adding a state tax on e-cigarettes that is equal to the tobacco tax rate on traditional cigarettes—Prohibiting the sale of flavored liquids for e-cigarettes—Allowing localities to enact stricter controls than the state on all tobacco and e-cigarette products (such as raising the minimum age for purchase).

"Kentucky just can't afford to addict another generation to [tobacco products](#), and the fact that youth e-cig use is often a gateway to cigarette smoking makes immediate action imperative," said Ben Chandler, president and CEO of the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky.

"Kids may think e-cigs are safe for them to use, but they're not. Short-term, the nicotine in e-cigs harms the parts of kids' brains that control learning and impulse control."

Chandler explained that e-cig vapor also has chemicals and metals that can damage lungs—for both the youth who is vaping and those who inhale the secondhand vapor.

"Longer term, the gateway effect means kids who use e-cigs today are significantly increasing their risk for cancer, [heart disease](#), stroke, oral disease and tooth loss, and all the other smoking-related health issues later on," he said.

Chandler told the Herald-Leader that there's also an enforcement issue.

"These things are being sold in stores where IDs are not checked very well," he said.

Last week, Lexington high school principals said that [e-cigarette](#) use on school campuses was rampant.

Flavored liquids, especially the fruity flavors, in e-cigarettes attract teens to the products and their varying levels of nicotine can lead to teens' addiction. Some e-cigarettes contain as much nicotine as an entire pack of cigarettes, officials said in a statement.

The most popular product is Juul which looks like a USB flash drive and comes in a variety of flavors.

"In 2018, you cannot talk about health and kids

without talking about e-cigs. E-cig use is rampant; it is unregulated. And unless we as a Commonwealth treat e-cigs as the health threat it is—in terms of now and in the future - ... Kentucky will still be the cancer capital of the nation," said Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates in a statement.

"Purveyors of e-cigs know exactly what they are doing in offering a gateway product to tobacco use and we need to call them on it. Kentucky's kids need our elected leaders—from county courthouses to Frankfort—to act on their behalf."

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