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Minnesota Department of Health

News Release

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Contact information

Cigarette use among high school students drops to 10.6 percent Minnesota's first e-cigarette survey finds 12.9 percent used or tried e-cigs during the past month

The 2014 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey found that the percent of high school students who smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days dropped from 18.1 percent in 2011 to 10.6 percent in 2014.

This decline in cigarette smoking, the steepest ever recorded by the Minnesota youth survey, follows extensive efforts to curb cigarette smoking including a 2013 tobacco tax, bans on indoor smoking, and tighter restrictions on youth access to tobacco products. Minnesota also saw declines between 2011 and 2014 in the use of chewing tobacco and cigars, according to the survey.

However, for the first time, the survey also asked about e-cigarette use and found that 12.9 percent of high school students used or tried an electronic cigarette in the past 30 days. The survey found that 28 percent of high school students reported ever having tried an e-cigarette.

"These new findings indicate that our statewide efforts to reduce and prevent conventional tobacco use among Minnesota children are working," said Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Ed Ehlinger. "At the same time, we are seeing a wild-west approach toward e-cigarettes, which allows tobacco companies unlimited marketing access to young men and women. This has led to increasing numbers of Minnesota high school and middle school students using e-cigarettes."

Many young people are being exposed to nicotine, which is highly addictive, through e-cigarettes. An estimated 85,900 Minnesota public school students in grades 6-12 have tried e-cigarettes, and 38,400 reported using them in the past 30 days. Nicotine is known to harm adolescent brain development. Nearly one-fourth of high school students who have tried an e-cigarette have never tried another tobacco product.

Minnesota high school students are exposed to a wide range of e-cigarette marketing tactics previously used to sell cigarettes. More than half of high school students, 57 percent, saw e-cigarette ads on TV in the past 30 days. About half, 48 percent, saw ads in convenience stores. Students also saw e-cigarettes in ads on the Internet, magazines and billboards, and in the hands of actors in movies or on TV. Retailers have also started selling candy flavored e-cigarette products.

"I have a sense of déjà vu about e-cigarettes," Ehlinger said. "Tobacco companies are using old and well-tested marketing techniques to introduce children to a new product that delivers nicotine and potentially leads to the burden of addiction. We need to take a hard look at what actions we can take at local and state levels to stop this trend," Ehlinger said.

E-cigarettes are having such an impact in high schools that though the percent of high school students using any of the conventional tobacco products in the past 30 days fell from 25.8 percent in 2011 to 19.3 percent in 2014, the overall rate of tobacco use including e-cigarettes stayed about the same at 24.2 percent.

1.6 percent decline Shows gateway from more harmful tobacco products!

E-cigarettes are often cheap to buy, can be purchased on the Internet, and are available in an array of fruit and candy flavors. E-cigarettes are not regulated by the FDA and the overall health risks are unknown. The 2014

Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey included many questions about new products, especially electronic cigarettes, as well as traditional conventional tobacco products. Public schools and classrooms across the state were selected at random and invited to participate. Overall, 4,243 students in grades 6 through 12 took the survey.

Minnesota youth also continued to use menthol cigarettes. Menthol masks the harshness and irritation that new smokers may feel. Nearly half of high school smokers (44.3 percent) usually smoke menthols. In contrast, only 22.0 percent of Minnesota adult smokers usually smoke menthols.

For more information on e-cigarettes, visit www.health.mn.gov/ecigarettes (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/ecigarettes>).

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