

Vape debate ...

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Ask high school students now, three years later, and they'll tell you that number is much higher and crosses all student populations. The high school administrators agree.

"This stuff is affecting 4.0 students, athletes, art kids, band kids, almost everyone," Battaglia said. "We've had kids that vaped in class and on buses. I watched a kid vape right in the cafeteria. It's wild. Kids would never try to smoke a cigarette in class."

Battaglia said they've had a lot more suspensions this year than other recent years.

"Pretty much all [the violations] are from vaping," he said, explaining that it feels like kids have a "shared ignorance" and simply don't see e-cigarettes as harmful.

It's not just an issue in Cloquet either.

Battaglia said the issue of how to respond to the epidemic of e-cigarettes dominates nearly every principal meeting he attends, as schools across the Northland struggle to respond to something that can be almost impossible to detect.

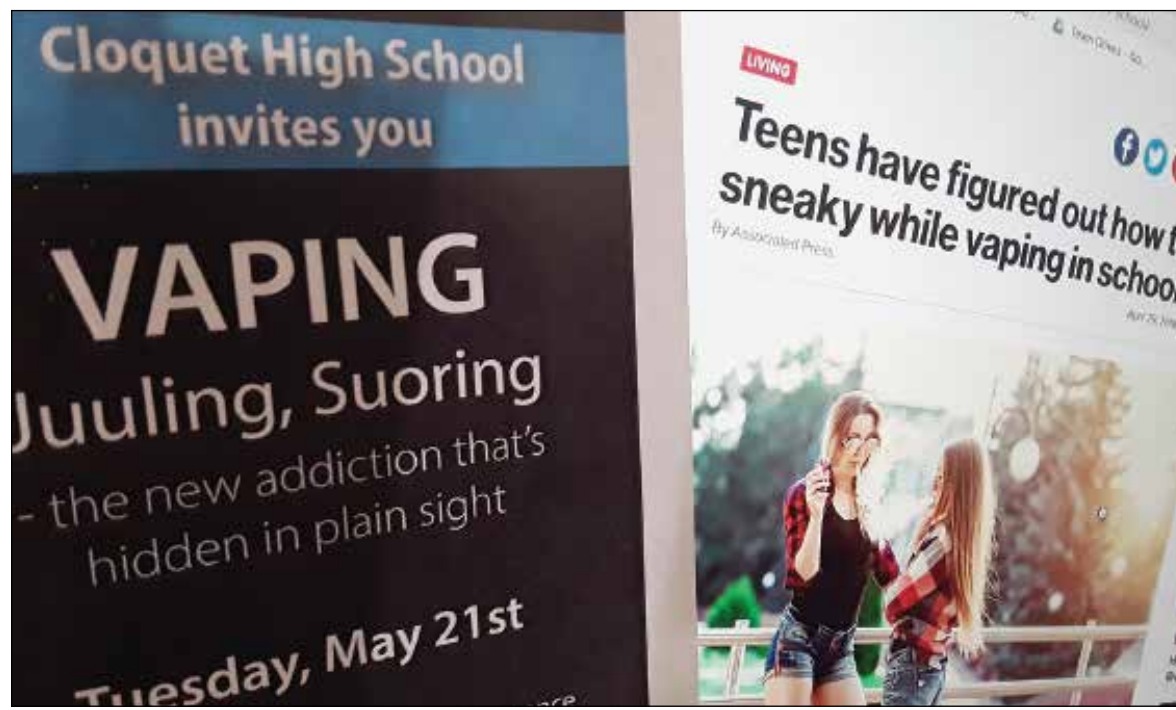
Unlike even the early e-cigarettes, the latest generation of vaping devices such as Juul, Suorin and myblu produce little aerosol, and the smell can be similar to a lip gloss, strong gum or perfume, depending on what "flavor" the kids buy, Prosen said.

"Some schools in the metro are using bathroom monitors but that won't work ... unless they're going to put someone in the stalls with the kids," he said, explaining how you really have to see someone vaping to detect it most of the time.

Dealing with the epidemic of vaping has also taken a lot of administrative time this year, both men said.

"It's got to be solved with education," Battaglia added. "Hopefully in a couple of years from now everyone will recognize it as unhealthy."

With that goal in mind, the school was holding an educational forum for all of its students Thursday during school after this issue of the Pine Knot News went to press. They've also set up a panel discussion open to all parents and community members



from 7-8:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 21 in the Cloquet High School auditorium.

Another partial solution for the issue of youth using e-cigarettes locally would be raising the age limit for purchasing and using cigarettes and e-cigarettes to 21, Prosen said.

As of Tuesday, 34 Minnesota cities and counties have passed Tobacco 21 laws. Carlton County could be No. 35 if the legislature fails to pass the statewide legislation currently under consideration, according to Carlton County attorney Lauri Ketola, who has been working with representatives from Cloquet, Carlton County and the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa on passing a T21 ordinance.

Ketola pointed out that the introduction of e-cigarettes and vaping has made nicotine use more attractive to young people.

"The devices are small and concealable and have a perceived "cool" factor," Ketola said, adding that they have seen a fair number of vaping cases in the courts, but the goal of a T21 ordinance is more about public health. "The problem is that the nicotine level is so high that young people are becoming addicted, quickly. By raising the age to purchase e-cig and vaping devices and cartridges, we can reduce or delay use of nicotine. In addition, by raising the purchasing age to 21, students in the high school will be too young to purchase for younger students."

Ironically, e-cigarettes were initially marketed as something to help people quit smoking, said

Pat McKone of the American Lung Association in Duluth. McKone pointed out that a single JUUL pod contains as much nicotine as two packs of 20 cigarettes. (JUUL is partly owned by Phillip Morris, the company that makes Marlboro cigarettes.)

"We're hearing about kids who are addicted in a week or two," McKone said, "and using about a pod a day. Others use up to four pods a day. That's like smoking eight packs of cigarettes."

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), nicotine can harm the developing brain, particularly the parts that control attention, learning, mood and impulse control. It also changes the way synapses — or connections — are formed between brain cells whenever a new memory is created or a new skill learned.

Scientists are still learning about the long-term effects of e-cigarettes, but the CDC states that the e-cigarette aerosol that users inhale and exhale can contain nicotine, volatile organic compounds, heavy metals such as nickel, tin and lead, flavorings such as diacetyl that have been linked to lung diseases and ultra-fine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs. Additionally, nicotine in any form may also prime young brains for addiction.

More than nicotine

Another problem is the fact that the liquid used inside an e-cigarette or vape can be filled with just about any liquid. People often smoke THC — the chemical in marijuana that makes a

person feel high — in much more concentrated forms in a vaping device.

"The use of THC is illegal regardless of age," Ketola said. "My concern is that people don't understand that possession of marijuana in plant form is a misdemeanor while THC wax and oil have a much higher concentration of THC with questionable unregulated additives. The possession of THC is either a gross misdemeanor or felony and can have lifelong implications for young people. It is our job to help protect young people from making life-altering decisions while their brains are developing."

People can also put even worse things into a vaping device, or so much THC that it physically harms someone.

"Because the THC concentrate is so high in the vapes and wax, compared to just smoking a regular bud, there's potential for an overdose," said Drew Abrahamson, a member of the East Central Drug and Violent Offender Task Force who will be part of Tuesday's panel discussion. "Everybody's body reacts differently. Some people just get high and some people it puts into a coma."

Prosen tells how the school had to call for medical help twice in one day because a group of students were passing around a vape. Four or five of them took a hit off it and two ended up needing medical attention, at least one of them passing out.

Battaglia holds up a small bottle with a dropper and a brown liquid inside.

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All residents are invited to a "Vaping, Juuling, Suoring: the new addiction that's hidden in plain sight" panel discussion for parents and community members held 7-8:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 21 in the Cloquet High School auditorium. The same evening, the Fond du Lac "Hidden in Plain Sight" trailer — which is used to educate people about what to look for in a household where someone might be using drugs or other substances — will be parked outside the main entrance of the high school 6-8 p.m. for people to tour in small groups.

"This is the scary stuff," he said.

School officials still don't know what was in the vape.

While the school handles most tobacco violations in-house, they involve the police when illegal substances — such as marijuana or the mystery vape — could be involved. School resource officer Eric Blesener sent a sample of the mystery liquid to the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to be investigated.

"The police think it might be something that came over from China," Battaglia said. "They're finding [some sellers] fill with whatever they can get, pesticides, whatever."

Prosen said people in the U.S. can also buy labeled boxes and vials online and put whatever concoction they want inside, and it looks like it was professionally manufactured.

"You have no idea what you're smoking or vaping unless you're the one who bought the vape and filled it," he said. "Rewind 10 years and you knew what was in a cigarette. Now you're sharing something but you have no idea what's really in it."

He compares it to kids sharing pills five years ago.

"It's the same mentality," he said.

"Most teenagers don't look at long-term effects, what could this do to me in the next 10 or 15 years. They only think about the next five minutes."

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