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Media Contact: Janet D'Alesandro; [janetd@ajj.com](mailto:janetd@ajj.com), [856-256-2422](tel:856-256-2422)

## [Nurse Expert: Vaping is an Epidemic; Parents and Providers Must Act Immediately](#)

PITMAN, NJ – The number of deaths and illnesses caused by vaping is “just the tip of the iceberg,” according to Janice Selekman, DNSc, RN, NCSN, FNASN, a national expert on high-risk behavior among adolescents, and there are specific interventions parents and providers should take immediately to save the lives and health of America’s young people.

“It’s the most current fad right now for children and teens,” she said. “Most adults don’t understand it and it’s very high risk for addiction, as well as being potentially deadly.”

Selekman, who was among the first experts in the country to ring the alarm bell about vaping in [this article](#) in *Pediatric Nursing journal*, says only fast and definitive action will save the estimated 2 million teens and an increasing number of adults and young children who use some form of e-cigarette.

“First, we must recognize vaping is an epidemic and we must take action now to protect our children,” Selekman says in a [new podcast on the topic](#). “Next we need to change policy, enact restrictions, and ban online sales and ads. And third, parents, teachers, nurses, and other health care providers must become educated on the facts and dangers.”

Selekman says young people are extremely clever at hiding the e-cigarettes,

which can look like USB flash drives or mascara tubes. They will also deny using the devices, she says, so it's better to ask an open-ended question like "When was the last time you vaped?" rather than "Do you vape?"

### **The Lure of the Vape**

In Selekmán's [podcast interview](#) with nursing research scientist Bernice Mowery, PhD, PNP, RN, she says vaping appeals to young people for several reasons.

"Vaping devices can be used easily at school or home because they are harder to detect and not as odorous as cigarettes," she said. In addition, there are more than 7,500 flavorings added by manufacturers such as caramel candy, vanilla, and gummy bear, engineered and marketed to appeal to teens.

"In fact, taste/flavoring is one of the most commonly cited reasons for e-cigarette use among youth," Selekmán writes in her article.

Recent news has highlighted cases of severe lung damage. In her article and the podcast interview, Selekmán describes "popcorn lung," or bronchiolitis obliterans, a serious and incurable scarring of the bronchioles caused by inhaling the chemicals found in some of the flavorings. In addition, heavy metals are released by the heating coil in the vaping device, and vitamin E oil is often added to the pods, especially when marijuana (commonly the compound tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC) is included. All of these may contribute to the dramatic lung damage and lipoid pneumonia now being seen.

It is these toxic chemicals, Selekmán says, that are causing lung damage in a much shorter time span – as little as 1 to 2 years – in those who vape, compared to cigarettes, which can take decades to do severe damage.

Selekmán says the implications of alterations to the brain and behavioral changes in youth are also particularly disturbing.

"The developing adolescent brain is particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of exposure to nicotine," she writes in her article. Nicotine addiction reduces young people's impulse control, impairs their cognitive abilities, contributes to mood disorders, and often leads them to use other addictive drugs.

While e-cigarettes are marketed as a healthier choice, Selekmán says the nicotine

amounts are often higher, with each pod containing 40-59 mg of nicotine, about the same as an entire pack of cigarettes. Going from bad to worse, young people often add other drugs, such as cannabinoids, to the mix.

### **No Time to Waste**

Selekman calls for an immediate and sweeping national campaign to stem the tide of vaping injuries and deaths.

“A comprehensive approach to this problem is needed, including regulation, education, and economic and social strategies. This comprehensive approach also includes a partnership with parents,” she writes.

Strategies for nurses, health care providers, educators, and parents should include the following:

- Check for nicotine dependence with the “5 A’s” – Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist, Arrange.
- Understand what pulls young people to vape; ask questions to better understand their rationale.
- Change signs in schools from “No Smoking” to “No Smoking or Vaping.”
- Warn youth about the risk of all forms of nicotine use.
- Work toward primary prevention: stopping addictive-related behavior before it starts (i.e. praise youth for making smart choices, being a non-smoker, and not vaping.)

## **More Pediatric Nursing News, Articles, and Podcasts**

**Members of the media:** If you would like to interview Janice Selekman or write an article on vaping use among adolescents, please contact Janet D’Alesandro at [856-256-2422](tel:856-256-2422); [janetd@ajj.com](mailto:janetd@ajj.com).

### **Pediatric Nursing**

East Holly Avenue, Box 56 // Pitman, NJ 08071-0056

[856-256-2300](tel:856-256-2300) // [pnjrnl@ajj.com](mailto:pnjrnl@ajj.com) // [www.pediatricnursing.net](http://www.pediatricnursing.net)

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