

Friday, 3 March 2023

Dear Parents, Carers and Students

I write to express my increasing alarm and concern about the use of vapes in our community, especially among young people, and to advocate for us all to be better informed ahead we, as a society, head further into what is **already a major crisis of long term harm and damage to the health of young people as well criminality, violence and early substance abuse behaviours.**

Fortunately, the majority of our young people have not been touched by the dangers of vaping, but usage is skyrocketing nationwide, even amongst our youngest students. There are actions we can all take as citizens, parents and leaders in our community, but being informed is key. **The harm that vaping can cause is not to be underestimated.**

**Young people are being exploited and harmed by subtle but carefully designed marketing on social media,** and they may have received inaccurate information on their dangers from those same sources and from each other.



*Brightly coloured packaging and flavours are used to attract young people to vaping. (Getty Images: AFP)*

It is hard to quantify how many young people are accessing vapes. Recent data from the NSW Cancer Council (Generation Vape Study) probably is the tip of the iceberg - their study revealed one-third (33%) of the 14 to 17 surveyed had vaped. I know my peer principals in state, independent, and catholic schools are seeing

alarming high levels of usage and impacts on young people.

Like most schools, we have vape sensors installed in our bathrooms and deal daily with the problem. **Secondary problems also occur that are similar to drug abuse issues – dealing and criminality, conflict and violence relating to debts and the manipulation of young people by adult dealers of vapes.**

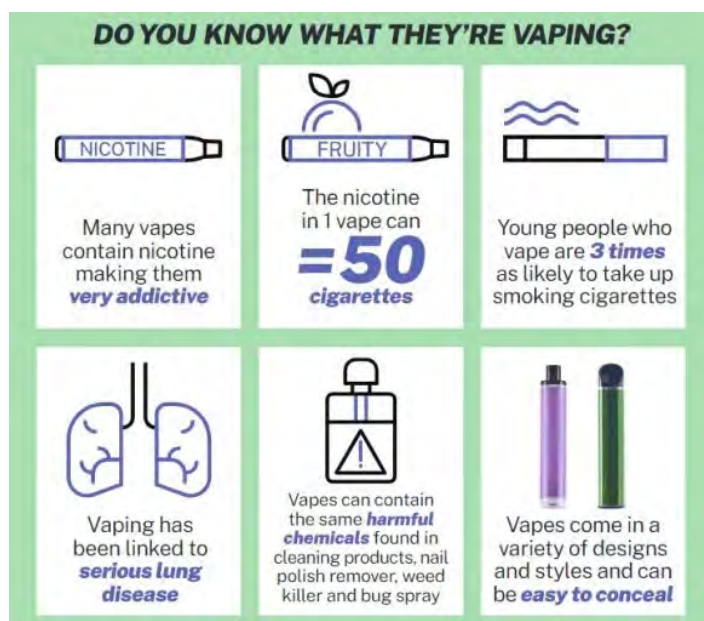
Sadly, young people should be very much protected from accessing and using vapes that contain nicotine. The reality is they are not. **Technically, they are only available in Australia to adults with a prescription issued for the purpose of helping a patient quit smoking. This type is only allowed to be sold in pharmacies,** not in convenience stores, supermarkets or service stations like cigarettes. It is an offence to sell non-nicotine vapes to anyone under 18, but these are marketed and sold widely in convenience stores and other such venues. **The health impacts of these non-nicotine vapes are quite dramatic, with over 200 chemicals being inhaled by the user** (see the ABC video below). Their danger to the lungs of young people in the short and long term is not to be underestimated.

Additionally, it has been found very alarmingly **that many of the vapes marketed as non-nicotine vapes do, in fact, contain nicotine** (see the BTN video where a chemist opens and analyses vapes). Vapes deliver a toxic mix of chemicals deep into the delicate lung tissue of the user— causing inflammation, worsening common conditions like asthma, and possibly increasing the risk of significant, long-term disease.

There are no quality or safety standards for vapes, meaning the vaping industry is manufacturing these products without any regulations on their contents and labelling. At school, we have carefully cut open vapes (not recommended at home), and **you see the evidence that even the plastic container and foam filter are being melted and inhaled in the process.** There is no indication or labelling of the many chemicals contained in the vape. The insides reveal that most are handmade, with the batteries affixed by sticky tape and may point to dangerous and nasty labour exploitation at the point of manufacture.

Many of the chemicals found in vapes are highly corrosive and don't belong in our lungs — like acetone, which is commonly found in paint thinner and pesticides. Other substances found in vapes include formaldehyde, acetaldehyde and acrolein, which are known to cause cancer. Some of the chemicals in vape aerosols can also cause DNA damage. The liquids inside vapes can poison children and adults through swallowing or skin contact.

Our school nurse and other well-being staff are working with students to better educate and inform them, but please have some conversations at home or make contact if we can assist in any way.



*some of the dangers of vaping (WA Government)*

Dave Armstrong  
Executive Principal

[dave.armstrong@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:dave.armstrong@education.vic.gov.au)

## Resources for parents, carers and young people:

- Great 4min video to watch together with your children on the science of vaping by the BTN team <https://www.abc.net.au/btn/high/the-science-of-vaping/101943316>
- Vaping exposes inhalers to more than 200 chemicals <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAeXmCYdwfs>
- Vaping is becoming more and more prevalent among kids. Here's what parents should know <https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2022-12-05/vaping-what-parents-need-to-know-how-to-help-kids/101725162>

- Department of Education Smoking and Vaping Advice to Parents <https://www.vic.gov.au/smoking-and-vaping-advice-parents>
- My teen's vaping. What should I say? 3 expert tips on how to approach 'the talk' <https://theconversation.com/my-teens-vaping-what-should-i-say-3-expert-tips-on-how-to-approach-the-talk-196205>
- Quit Line: Resources for parents, teachers and teens explaining the risks associated with e-cigarette use among teens <https://www.quit.org.au/articles/teenvaping/>