



According to a recent survey conducted by Cincinnati-based PreventionFIRST!, substance abuse among students in grades 7-12 in the Greater Cincinnati region is down.

Our community has a lot of work to do to continue this trend.

The Children's Home of Cincinnati will continue to provide prevention and early intervention services to youth and will remain vigilant about upcoming trends such as a rising use of e-cigarettes, commonly referred to as "vaping."

PreventionFirst! found that among the nearly 33,000 public and private school students surveyed across Southwestern Ohio, prescription drug abuse and abuse of heroin is [trending downward](#) while perceived harm of marijuana use has largely remained unchanged. Alcohol and cigarette use among students is trending downward overall; however, alcohol, along with marijuana and non-medical use of prescription drugs do remain among the substances youth tend to abuse if using controlled substances at all.

"The good news is drug use is down among teenagers," said Debbie Gingrich, senior director of mental health community services at The Children's Home of Cincinnati. "Parents and friends rank among the top-influencer's in a child's life and this trend can be partially attributed to parental disapproval of drug use as well as peer disapproval among teens.

"But the use of e-cigarettes among this vulnerable population is rising. This simply has to be part of the conversation parents have with their kids today," she said.

Research gleaned by PreventionFIRST! agrees. They say parents, teachers and others should be aware of the chemical make-up of these products.

“There is a serious myth that [e-cigarettes use] mostly water vapor,” said Sarah Sawmiller PreventionFirst! program manager of evaluation. “There is actually very little water involved. Often it’s mostly an aerosol containing propylene glycol. This chemical has been shown to cause liver and retinal damage.”

The Children’s Home of Cincinnati’s trained specialists provided almost 63,000 treatment hours spanning a variety of services to area students in local schools last year. Most of the agency’s providers in partner schools are reporting a sharp increase in the use of e-cigarettes among students.

“E-cigarette use, to put it plainly, scares me,” says Gingrich. “Brain development in young people starts in the womb and develops consistently up to and including around 25 years old. The intoxicants in e-cigarettes are highly addictive and can dramatically impede brain development.”

According to the surgeon general, Gingrich is correct. The surgeon general’s [website](#) says that, just like cigarettes, vaping products contain nicotine but also can contain other harmful ingredients such as ultrafine particles that can be deeply inhaled into the lungs and diacetyl, which is often used as a product flavor enhancer that has been linked to lung disease.

“These products also contain metal alloys like lead, nickel and tin; none of which anyone wants ingested into a pair of healthy lungs,” Gingrich said.

“Diacetyl is a chemical used in a lot of the flavoring of Juul and other EVPs (electronic vapor products),” said Sawmiller. “This is the chemical that was used in the popcorn flavoring that caused the workers in a microwave popcorn factory to have damage to the smallest parts of their lungs.”

Sawmiller said she is also aware of current research that’s examining whether EVP products increase the same likelihood of respiratory infections that has been linked to tobacco and marijuana smokers.

Gingrich said she’s encouraged by the downward trend of prescription drug abuse and decline in use of illegal drugs among youth; but, she says our community should keep the conversation alive. She encourages parents and guardians to keep all medications in a locked container and, if the prescriptions have expired, to check with a local pharmacist to see if they’ll dispose of the medications properly on your behalf.

And, she says, the continuing conversation with area youth should include a discussion about e-cigarettes too.

“Parents, teachers, members of the clergy and other influences should keep talking to youth about these very real dangers in our community so the downward trend in drug use continues,” she said. “But, today, that conversation has to include the harmful effects of vaping as well.”

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