Welcome Back!

We hope you enjoyed the holiday season and are settling well into the New Year.

This issue of the Educator features some timely articles on electronic cigarettes - how one Southern California community is addressing the growing trend among teens, and how instructors can think about incorporating e-cigarette content into the Project ALERT curriculum. Also, new data on youth substance use have been released from Monitoring the Future - check out what’s changed since 2013. Finally, our Project ALERT State of the Program Survey is up and running! It’s brief, it’s confidential, and we'd love to get your feedback on Project ALERT - and we’d love for you to win in our random drawing of one of 5 $50 Amazon gift cards just for completing it!

A Creative Way to Address the Increase in Electronic Cigarette Use by Teens

An Example from Orange County, California

By Ryan Crowdis and Pamela Luna

Emerging tobacco products such as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes or e-cigs) and hookahs are quickly gaining popularity among youth. According to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), between 2011 and 2012, e-cigarette experimentation and use doubled among middle school and high school students. The CDC also reports that 1 in 10 high school students have experimented with e-cigarettes.(1)

Project ALERT has been a substance use awareness program of choice for middle schools throughout Orange County, California. In just over four years, 102 teachers and other professionals have been trained to implement Project ALERT and almost 57,000 students have received the program. Orange County is continuing to use Project ALERT for their latest Tobacco-Use Prevention Education (TUPE) grant that will serve 7 Orange County school districts through June 30, 2017. Ryan Crowdis, TUPE project manager at the Orange County Department of Education states, “We have had a lot of support implementing Project ALERT and it is an extremely valuable part of our prevention strategy.”

In 2013, the county began to see a steady rise in the use of e-cigarettes among youth and they became immediately active on two fronts. First, they developed a presentation that would inform school staff and parents about this emerging trend. At the time, there was little information readily available to the public about the product and its risks. This was a concern not only of those working in the schools but also for those in health and law enforcement agencies. After receiving numerous requests for information on this topic by school and district administration, Stacy Deeble-Reynolds, prevention coordinator for the Orange County Department of Education, contacted the Orange County Health Care Agency and the Orange County Sheriff’s Department to develop a presentation so that school staff and parents could learn about this emerging trend. This presentation has been given to over 1,000 school staff and parents in the last 11 months. “We don’t want students to be continually smoking these devices, then 20 years down the road not be able to do things like play soccer with their kids because they can’t breathe,” says Deeble-Reynolds. Second, they developed a youth awareness and prevention campaign about the potential harmful effects of e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery devices, targeting students aged 12-17. The Orange County Department of Education again partnered with the Orange County Health Care Agency and the Orange County
Sheriff’s Department to lead this effort.

The cornerstone of the campaign is the website, notsafe.org, which consists of three main sections that present information and resources about e-cigarettes. The heart of the website is a meme generator, located on the home page, which creates eye-catching, informative pictures and statements that can be easily shared via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and email.

![Sample of a "meme" on the home page](image)

The second section, “Vaping Facts” is designed to give readers information on the complex array of issues related to e-cigarette use. The third section provides links to resources that were used to develop the campaign.

The design team conducted focus groups with local middle and high school students and asked them what an effective e-cigarette prevention campaign would include. As the focus groups transpired, program staff learned that many students wanted to know what chemicals were in these products and what concrete information was available about e-cigarettes. A majority of participating students felt the best way to prevent their peers from using e-cigarettes would be to take a lesson from tobacco prevention campaigns and educate youth on what chemicals are found in e-cigarette vapor and how these chemicals may affect your body. The focus groups and key partners worked together to design the Not So Safe e-cigarette prevention campaign and the notsafe.org website.

Since its launch in May 2014, teachers at middle schools in Orange County have been utilizing the notsafe.org website as a way to enhance their tobacco-related Project ALERT lessons. Crowds notes, “We chose Project ALERT because it has been used in the county for years and has a proven track record. Our team has found it very easy to insert supplemental information about electronic cigarettes into the curriculum.” The most common ways the website has been used within the lessons have been (A) classroom discussions, where teachers share and review the information on the website with students and ask them to do their own research on the topic of e-cigarettes, and (B) student meme generation, where teachers have students create their own memes using the website as a guide. Students can use the chemical names from the website or any of the other chemicals that have been found in e-cigarette vapor.

As e-cigarettes become more popular with youth, Crowds and colleagues believe this campaign will be important in educating them about the consequences of their use. It will also encourage students and educators to dialogue about related issues and work together to prevent youth from using these devices.

*Project ALERT Director’s note:* This article was written by Ryan Crowds with editorial assistance from Dr. Pamela Luna. Educators like Ryan Crowds and other leaders in Orange County, California offer an example of addressing emerging e-cigarette concerns and adapting Project ALERT to meet those needs, while maintaining fidelity to this evidence-based program. Others are encouraged to visit the notsafe.org website.

1. Find more information about this cited material on the CDC website.
2. A meme is a humorous image, video, piece of text, etc., that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly, often as mimicry, from person to person via the internet.

*Teen image courtesy of Fotolia, copyright darkhorsa2012. Used by permission. Other images used by permission from notsafe.org.*
Project ALERT Director’s note: Dr. Pamela Luna, a senior Project ALERT trainer, drafted the following suggestions to help instructors facilitate discussion about e-cigarettes into the established Project ALERT curriculum. As drug popularity and culture surrounding use fluctuates, it is important for Project ALERT teachers to stay informed about changes and be prepared to respond to student questions. The suggested modifications to the original Project ALERT curriculum, while not empirically tested, still match the core principles that drive the effectiveness of Project ALERT.

Core Lesson 2: Consequences of Smoking Cigarettes and Marijuana

Activity 3: Compare Cigarettes and Smokeless Tobacco
In the discussion of effects for smokeless tobacco, ask “Which of these effects are also true for electronic cigarettes?”

Note that the long-term health effects of using e-cigarettes are unknown, yet are potentially harmful. No one knows for sure what long-term damage vaping will do to your body. And we won't know for years. Here are some resources to review with or prior to discussions with students to help you answer their questions:

Resources for Classroom Use:
- Not So Safe
- Information from Kids Health
- NIDA for Teens

Resources for Teachers:
- Drug Facts from NIH
- Information from the US FDA
- More information from the US FDA
- CDC’s Mortality and Morbidity Weekly

Core Lesson 4: Introduction to Pressures

Activity 6: Rewrite Substance Ads
When reviewing ads for substances (currently alcohol and tobacco only), include ads for traditional cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, and e-cigarettes. Also, for the homework, when students are asked to “make a list of the slogans of all the ads for alcohol and cigarettes you see or hear on radio, billboards, magazines, television or internet/Websites,” ask them to also include ads related to e-cigarettes, including ads and signs for vape shops.

Core Lesson 9: Review and Practice Resistance Techniques

Activity 5: Play the Benefits Game
When asking students to play the Benefits game, in the part where “which group can be the first to come up with eight benefits of not using tobacco - cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, cigars,” include e-cigarettes and have students list the benefits of not using tobacco and/or e-cigarettes.

You may notice other opportunities to discuss e-cigarettes throughout the lessons. The best way to prepare is to learn about the negative effects of e-cigarettes (including staying up-to-date on the emerging research in...
articles throughout the year

the field) so you can give informative answers to students when they ask about e-cigarettes. Many of the messages they may be receiving is that they are “safer than cigarettes,” “are not addicting,” or, if they are already using cigarettes regularly, “an effective way to quit smoking.”

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