

By: ABBIE MILLER

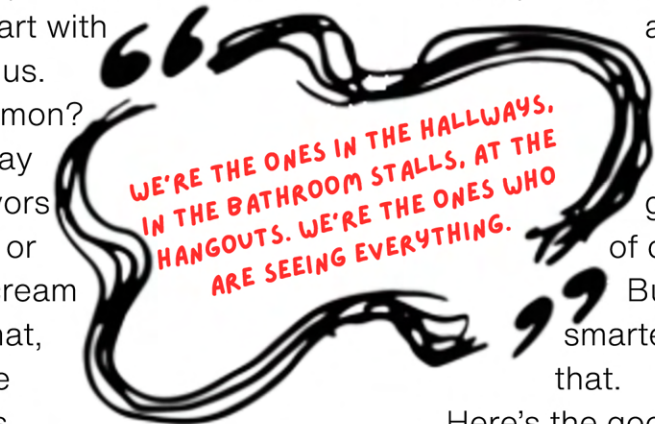
If you walked into almost any high school in Nebraska and asked a student if they know someone who has vaped or currently vapes, they'd probably say yes. For a long time, it seemed like *everyone* was doing it. But here's the truth: fewer teens are vaping now than a few years ago. According to a 2019 survey conducted by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), about 17% of Nebraska students said they vaped regularly. By 2023, though, the NDE reported that the number had dropped to around 7%. That is progress—but there are still thousands of teens in our state who are hooked.

Here's the thing: this isn't a problem for the adults around us to try and figure out. It's all on us. We're the ones in the hallways, in the bathroom stalls, at the hangouts. We're the ones who are seeing everything. If fewer and fewer of

Change starts with us: why vaping should not be normalized

us pick up a vape and speak up when we see people doing it, then we can prove it's not normal anymore. Change doesn't start with rules on paper; it starts with us.

So, why is vaping so common? One primary reason is the way they are advertised. The flavors are usually sweet like candy or fruits, which don't exactly scream "adult product." On top of that, some of the newer vapes are starting to get touch screens on them, allowing people to play games or play music from their vapes. You read that right,

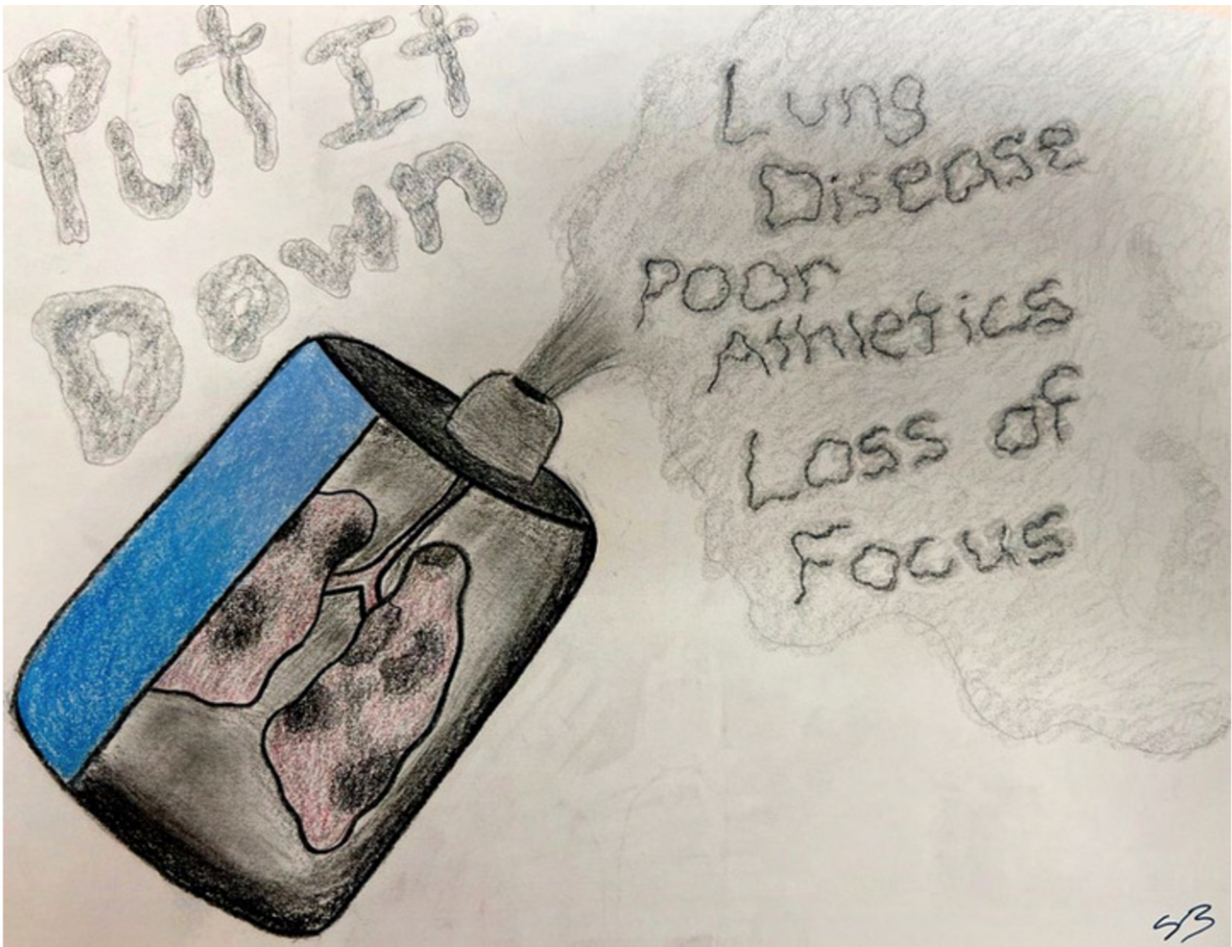


they can now play games from them. Once again, it seems that those companies are targeting us to be their customers. Add in all the influencers on TikTok that make vaping look fun or harmless, and it's no wonder so many high schoolers have tried it before. On top of that, even though you're supposed to be 21 when you buy them, teens still get them from older friends, stores that fail to check an ID, or online shops that have a

very sketchy age verification.

Companies have never had our health in mind; all they care about is our money. They make vaping look fun and cool, but in reality, they're just trying to hook their next generation of customers. But we're smarter than that.

Here's the good news. Nebraska teens have been quitting. Many are beginning to realize that it's not worth the money, stress, and health risks. If you or someone you know wants help quitting, many resources can guide you on the path to being vape-free. And if you don't vape, speaking up and being honest with your friends matters way more than you think. Vaping might feel normal right now, but we don't have to let it stay that way. We all have the power to change what feels normal and make vaping something Nebraska teens leave behind.



Cartoon by Scarlett Bragg.

CALL
1-800-QUIT-NOW
(784-8669)

CALL (Spanish Speaking)
1-855-DÉJELO-YA
(335-3569)

THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF E-CIGARETTES

Nicotine Addiction

- Nicotine affects brain development, especially in teens, leading to long-term dependency
- Increases anxiety levels and leads to intense cravings

FDA Oversight & Risks

- Most e-cigarette products are NOT FDA-approved for safety
- The FDA is working on regulations, but many products remain untested

Lung Damage

- Vaping can cause inflammation and severe lung injuries like "popcorn lung"

Harmful Chemicals

- Vape liquids contain heavy metals such as nickel, tin, and lead, as well as volatile organic compounds and toxic flavorings

Targeting Youth

- In 2024, nearly 90% of youth e-cigarette users chose fruit or candy flavors, sparking addiction and health concerns

Heart Damage

- Over time, vaping raises the risk of heart disease and stroke

information from (<https://www.lung.org/>)

Information graphic by Jacqueline Ramirez Estrada