

# CV Coalition hosts discussion on e-cigarette use

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Traditional cigarette use is no longer “in” for high school students.

That is according to a presentation given by Corey Beckwith of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services. Beckwith spoke to the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families on Feb. 9, and he showed how e-cigarette use has surpassed traditional cigarette use among high school students.

“That’s pretty shocking when you think 10 years ago, this product just didn’t exist,” Beckwith said.

Beckwith’s presentation showed that, according to a Center for Disease Control national survey of youth tobacco use, e-cigarette use increased from just more than 4 percent of high school students in 2013 to nearly 14 percent in 2014.

In that same time, traditional cigarette use dropped from about 13 percent to roughly 9 percent.

Beckwith said local data hasn’t become available yet on e-cigarette use because the results of the 2015 Michigan health survey of high school students are still being tabulated. The survey is administered every other year, and in 2013, e-cigarette use wasn’t a question on the survey.

The reasons for the increase in e-cigarette use are many, including the notion that teenagers don’t realize there is still nicotine in e-cigarettes, Beckwith said.

“They aren’t aware that there’s health risks, so people who might be turned off from smoking cigarettes because of those things, without the awareness of the actual effects and particularly the nicotine, they may be more likely to try an e-cigarette where they would kind of shy away from cigarettes,” Beckwith said.

Beckwith noted that there is evidence that points to e-cigarette use by teens as being a gateway to cigarette or marijuana use. A National Institute of Health study that he cited showed that 30.7 percent of e-cigarette users began using tobacco within six months, as compared to 8.1 percent of teenagers who began using tobacco after previously not using either e-cigarettes or cigarettes.

While Beckwith added that e-cigarettes are almost certainly less harmful than traditional cigarettes, there are plenty of unknowns with the new product due to the lack of FDA regulation.

“Since they’ve only been around for 10 years, there hasn’t been time to do the sort of studies that have given us that information on tobacco,” Beckwith said. “There is still a lot of potential in the research that has been done. It has shown some of the same chemicals that are found in cigarette smoke are in different varieties of e-cigarettes, but there’s no regulation, so what’s in one e-cigarette or one bottle of e-liquid could be very different from what’s in the next.”

While ingredients may vary, the amount of nicotine in a given product may also fluctuate greatly, Beckwith said, from small amounts of nicotine to levels greater than that of traditional cigarettes.

“It has to do with what sort of liquid they’re using and how much they use it. The difference is you have a bigger range than what you would have with cigarettes, so there’s more potential to have an increased amount,” Beckwith said.

Beckwith said products vary in terms of whether or not ingredients are listed on them.

“Particularly it’s a concern when you’re looking at something that’s coming from somewhere like China, where there are problems time to time with product safety,” Beckwith said. “It’s not clear what’s in these liquids, so the prospect of inhaling them is very concerning because we really aren’t sure what we’re getting.”

As it pertains to Chippewa Valley schools, Charlene McGunn, the director of the coalition, said it would be developing a task force to address the e-cigarette use by district students.

“It’s not huge, but there has been some taking from students vape products and e-cigarettes in the schools,” McGunn said. “What we’re seeing is an emerging trend. We’ve heard about this now for two years, but it’s accelerated, and we know there’s plenty of misinformation out there among students and adults, and we want to be able to educate on the issues.”

One area of concern is the lack of legal ramifications for e-cigarette use by minors. Presently, Michigan state law provides no regulations for purchasing e-cigarettes, which means minors can purchase the products, unlike traditional cigarettes. Beckwith said that’s not a very well-known fact.

“In Michigan, it’s still legal to sell e-cigarettes to a person under 18 years old,” Beckwith said. “I think a lot of business owners and kids don’t know that. They just assume it’s the same as tobacco. In many states, it is the same as tobacco. A lot of the products have ‘not for sale to minors’ on the package because it’s marketed to all states, and in some cases that is the case.”

Locally, Macomb Township adopted an ordinance in Oct. 2014 which prohibited minors from possessing vapor products, including e-cigarettes.

However, tickets issued as a result of that ordinance were thrown out because district courts were not allowed to process tickets for a minor, and juvenile courts couldn’t prosecute them because the state hadn’t passed such an ordinance yet, according to Macomb Township legal counsel Paul Addis.

Addis said the statute would be amended to make the offence a civil infraction as opposed to a misdemeanor, thereby making it enforceable at the district court level, similar to how minors can be prosecuted for purchasing traditional cigarettes.

Addis said the ordinance could be amended in the next 30-60 days. Clinton Township has no similar ordinance yet.