

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
COUNTY OF SUFFOLK

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Dear Editor,

The increase in the use of e-cigarettes among our youth concerns me as a father, a doctor and as a legislator. Accompanying this increase is a conception that e-cigarettes are safe; this is a myth that, left un-checked, will prove to be a disservice to our youth.

In April of this year, the CDC reported that e-cigarette use tripled among middle and high school students in a single year, surpassing every other tobacco product on the market including traditional cigarettes. What are the consequences to this trend? Let's be clear, e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which negatively affects developing adolescent brains. The teenage brain has higher levels of dopamine, the neurotransmitter responsible for regulating attention and impulse. Consumption of nicotine increases dopamine levels and makes the user vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviors, like becoming users of traditional cigarettes among other things. Studies of youth have shown that non-smokers with previous exposure to e-cigarettes compared with those without exposure were more likely to report use of a combustible tobacco product. This is not speculation or opinion; but evidenced based, scientific data.

Let's also consider that the delivery of formaldehyde through e-cigarettes is nearly 5 times greater than that of conventional cigarettes. Commonly used as a fungicide, germicide, disinfectant, and a preservative in mortuaries, formaldehyde has been classified as a human carcinogen. Prolonged exposure to formaldehyde can lead to cancer. There's no reason on this earth that a young person should be exposed to this, yet sadly they are.

I will continue to be a voice on this issue as it relates to our youth. It is our responsibility to afford young people the opportunity to become the best versions of themselves. Stacking the cards against them with an environment that makes them vulnerable to using e-cigarettes is just not acceptable. I will explore all options available and work with parents to protect against the dangers of e-cigarettes.

Sincerely,

William R. Spencer, M.D.
Suffolk County Legislator
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