

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 45: Youth Vaping and How to Reduce It

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Summary: Vaping is a source of curiosity for many underaged persons and concern among parents, educators and public health experts. Episode 45 of the TSET Better Health Podcast delves into the rise of youth vaping and efforts that are underway to reduce it. State Rep. Cynthia Roe, R-Lindsay, speaks on her bills that aim to reduce youth retail access to vape products and why she is passionate about it, and two high school students discuss how and why teens vape and the actions they suggest to help prevent it. And Kelli Brodersen, director of TSET Strategic Communications, describes new ad campaigns that speak to youth about the dangers of vaping and how to quit when they are ready.

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[Theme music]

James Tyree: Hello everyone and welcome to Episode 45 of the TSET Better Health Podcast. This is your host James Tyree, associate director of Integrated Communications at TSET ...

Dylan Jasna: And I am Dylan Jasna, TSET associate director of campaigns and brands. Many families recently returned from a spring break and now that the school year is in its final quarter, we know that summer vacation is not that far away. But whether students are in school or not, we know that vaping and other forms of tobacco use do not take a break because these nicotine products that the tobacco industry markets to youth are so very addictive.

J. Tyree: That's why this episode is devoted to youth vaping – its prevalence, its effect on kids and teens and some of the things being said and done to curtail it. It's a serious health issue because the most recent data shows 21.7 percent of high school students in Oklahoma – that's a little more than 1 in 5 – vape on a regular basis. Teens who vape are susceptible to lung damage down the road, and vaping can adversely affect brain functions now like memory, learning and moods.

D. Jasna: But efforts are underway to reduce vaping and other forms of tobacco use in our state, and today you will hear about some of them. Our guests include two high school students who are active in Youth Action in Health Leadership, or YAHL, who will share their perspectives from a peer level, and TSET's director of Strategic Communication will talk about new relatable ad campaigns that speak to youth about vaping, and why and how to stop or never start.

J. Tyree: But we will begin with a recent conversation I had with an Oklahoma state representative about legislation at the Capitol this year that address vaping and youth health. Let's meet her now.

Cynthia Roe: My name is Cindy Roe. I am a state representative for House District 42, and I'm also a nurse practitioner.

J. Tyree: There are so many important topics to consider at the Capitol and problems that need addressing. So why is reducing teen vaping so important to you?

C. Roe: Well, I am a nurse practitioner. I've been a registered nurse for 41 years and working in the hospital setting and such, I've seen the effects of smoking on people throughout my career. And vaping's new enough, we don't really know yet what long-term health consequences can be the result of that. And I think by catching these kids earlier and hopefully, we can reduce some of the long-term healthcare issues that they may have.

My concern is a lot of these kids that are vaping now are going to end up smoking cigarettes later and we know what cigarette smoking does to our lungs and our body. I just think we don't know yet what vaping's going to do. And I'm hoping that by catching these kids early, we might be able to prevent any kind of a transition to cigarettes as well.

J. Tyree: There is a bill that's in this legislature that you authored, that would increase fines for clerks and store owners who sell tobacco and vape products to young people under age 21. Why do you think this could be an effective way to curtail underage vaping?

C. Roe: Currently, the fines only affect the store clerk. It does not affect the store owner, and the fines really aren't that much right now, and it's easy to sell to someone and not get caught. My hope is that by increasing the fine and looping in the store owner, it would help them to be a little more responsible. And if you know that, for instance, on your first offense, if you get caught doing, it's a \$250 fine and it may make them think twice before selling vapes or tobacco to underage students.

J. Tyree: And now only clerks are fined, but this legislation involves store owners as well?

C. Roe: Yes. So after the second and third offense, there are some repercussions toward the store as far as their tobacco licenses and things. And I think money is an incentive for everybody to want to do better. Nobody wants to be fined. So my hope is that by including the store owner, that's going to make them a little more strict maybe on their clerks and making sure that they don't do that.

I think even though the fines may seem significant, but in the long run, the cost of the long-term health effects that may come from smoking or vaping are much higher than the fines. So I think if we can catch these... And to a teenager, if you've got a 13 or 14-year-old that gets caught with the, they potentially face a fine too, and that's a big deal.

J. Tyree: What other actions, whether at the Capitol or out in the community that you would like to see that could also help decrease youth tobacco use and vaping?

C. Roe: I think we need to really strengthen up the education component and maybe target the younger kids as much or more so than the adults or the older kids because those are the ones where we see the highest numbers in increase.

I believe it was the adolescent that junior high age group vaping was up like 238%. So we know that they got them. So I think if we can hit with the education and the effects that tobacco and nicotine vaping can have on our bodies, I think that would be a great start. And just keep hammering that point home. It's difficult, especially if you've got a kid whose parents are smoking and vaping because I think those kids have a higher incidence of doing it as well.

J. Tyree: While tobacco use and vaping damage health, physical activity, of course, improves it. And you also have a bill that would increase PE for elementary and secondary school kids. It's very important to maintain academic subjects in school, so how can schools make more time for physical activity, and why is it worth the effort to incorporate this?

C. Roe: So I did an interim study last fall that looked at physical activity. And when you look at the obesity rates now, and we now have kids that got a cell phone or a tablet or some other device or video game or something, kids aren't getting as active. Now we're seeing the increase in obesity rates. We have kids that are not in any kind of sports activities. They just go home and get on devices and are sitting in the house all day.

One of the other things that I did run into in talking with some of my school administrators is you have to be a certified PE teacher to be able to teach a PE class. Some of the schools we're going to have to work at maybe get some of their teachers certified.

So I think we're going to have to probably build up our pipeline of certified PE teachers a little bit for this to be successful. So I'm going to keep working on this because I really think that PE is important. If you look at states that have PE requirements that are looking at what I was trying to do 45 to 50 minutes a day, some of these studies have shown that these states have an improvement in educational outcomes.

So my goal is to get these kids moving around more and maybe we can reduce some of the obesity and then the long-term health consequences related to that. And then maybe help some of the mental health of these kids. And a lot of these studies also show that these kids that are active, junior high, high school, a lot of that physical activity will carry on into adulthood and help them be healthier adults as well.

J. Tyree: You chair the Public Health Committee in the House of Representatives and these bills we discussed today involve health for our kids. And I wanted to know your inspiration, whether it comes from you serving in the Legislature, being a mom, being a nurse, or something else.

C. Roe: I've been in healthcare for a very long time. I actually worked as a nurse's aide for a lot of years before I actually got to graduate from nursing school. And I will throw in there my first three years of college, I was a physical education major. So I've always kind of had that health just because of my background. When we come to the Capitol, they ask us, kind of give us a survey type, our interest in things, our backgrounds, and that kind of helps them know where to put us. So being the only medical professional as far as, now, we do have another nurse, although she has not worked for a nurse for a while,

but I was the only actually practicing healthcare provider in the house. So that was kind of perfect for the public health.

But once again, seeing the long-term effects of the smoking. And then if you look at the obesity, which can lead to diabetes and diabetes, people have a four-time increased risk of heart disease or heart related vascular complications because of diabetes, throwing out any other risk factor. Diabetes can lead to the kidney failure, the heart attack, strokes, peripheral vascular disease. So seeing all of that throughout my career, amputations, dialysis, all these heart attack strokes and the effects of those is kind of my passion to help people to get healthier.

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J. Tyree: Keeping up with legislation on health-related topics like limiting youth access to tobacco and vaping and increasing healthier environments is important, and private citizens always have the right on their own time to let their elected leaders know what they think in these areas and how important it is support policy that improve health. But adults aren't the only ones who can speak up and make a difference.

D. Jasna: That's right. Youth throughout our state are also active in promoting health, and they are speaking with their peers along with school and community leaders to create change. We recently spoke with two such students on separate occasions – both of whom are members of Youth Action for Health Leadership, or YAHL – to hear their perspectives on vaping.

Audrina Baker: I'm Audrina Baker. I attend Classen SAS at Northeast and I am a sophomore.

D. Jasna: In your experience, how widespread is vaping? How popular is it really?

A. Baker: I would say it's pretty popular. I think it all depends really what you are exposed to when you're younger. I think there's a big part of your home life and what you grew up around. But then there's kids who think it's cool because their family does it. And then so other kids see them doing it and they're like, "Oh, that's cool." And then it becomes a bigger and bigger problem.

But I feel like there's also the kids like me or some other YAHL members where they know how harmful these things are. They've seen it firsthand, what it can do to you. And so they stay away and try to inform kids, which is one of obviously Counteract Tobacco's main focuses.

D. Jasna: Do you think more and more kids are getting that message that, "Hey, vaping is not something I really want to do."

- A. Baker: From my experience, I would say yeah. A lot of people I hang around with, they're like, "This is not good." I'm currently working on a project with some of my other classmates and we're just trying to gather information from other kids around the school, like, "Do you vape? What do you feel about it?" And not everybody's going to be honest with us, but a main group of kids, they're like, "No, we don't vape. We don't think it's cool." And I feel like there is a lot of kids out there who are like, they know it's not good for them.
- D. Jasna: Well, that's good. How easy do you think it is for teens to get vapes or any tobacco product, whether at a store or from other adults?
- A. Baker: I think it's very easy for us to get it. I know a lot of kids, their parents will buy it for them, which is a huge problem. But also, there's that fact that we don't have comprehensive tobacco retail licensing and we have pre-emption put in place, so vendors are not held accountable when selling to minors. So you can go into a gas station maybe, and if the clerk allows it, they'll sell you a vape or e-cigarette. And so it's very easy. And then you can also just ask your peers like, "Hey, do you have something?" and most of the time they'll give it to you.
- D. Jasna: With that being the case, what are you and other students involved in YAHL or another organization doing to try and reduce tobacco use and vaping and promoting health in other ways at your school?
- A. Baker: Well, obviously we do YAHL and we go out into our communities and we do partner presentations, and we're forming the people around us, not only kids but also adults. Because they don't really know what's going on in the schools, they don't know what's going on in the youth as well as we do. So I feel like that's a big part of what YAHL does. But also in my school, like with the project, we're writing speeches right now and just also talking to our classmates. And I think it's important to get not only YAHL members involved, but also people who are not in YAHL involved. Because then we could get that widespread outreach so everybody could be like, "Hey, let's talk about this. This is a problem." And then it can get out there. It can spread.
- D. Jasna: What advice would you give to parents and other adults who want to help prevent a kid they care about from vaping, or maybe want to help them stop what they've already started?
- A. Baker: To touch on the kids who already do vape, I think if a parent caught them or something, I think addiction is a real problem. And I think it would be important for the parent to reach out and ask that kid, "What do you need? What is the best thing I can do for you?" But to prevent kids who haven't smoked or anything like that, I think the best thing to do is just to educate them on what could happen if they do, all the problems it could give you. And also just make them aware of all the chemicals that are used in these type of products.

D. Jasna: And finally, why do you personally care about tobacco and vape prevention for yourself and for others?

A. Baker: I care because I want to see my peers and myself, I want to see us grow and I want to see that we can do the things that we're meant to do. I want to achieve the best possible things for ourselves. And I feel like when kids smoke, they just limit their capacity. Their physical and mental capacity in general.

D. Jasna: Which is something that you do not want to see happen.

A. Baker: Yeah. Especially family and friends. That's sad to see.

J. Tyree: A few days later, I got a chance to interview another YAHL member who had profound statements about youth vaping.

Carina Chen: Hi, my name is Carina Chen I'm a junior at Classen SES and I've been a part of the Youth Action for Health Leadership team for 2 years.

J. Tyree: Diving into vaping. From what you see and hear in your school and your community Just how widespread is vaping, and how easy is it for teenagers to get vape products?

C. Chen: It's definitely extremely easy. Actually, I know a lot of kids personally in my school that actually sell their vaping products to other students. So. It's incredibly easy and there is an entire market for it within adolescence. It's very strange.

J. Tyree: Wow! So what is being done at your school to reduce vaping and what further actions would you like to see.

C. Chen: OK, so right now in the status quo in my high school I do not think we're taking enough action to prevent vaping within our student population. But I also believe it's not a failure on the part of the administrators. Because there's only so much you can do and right now all that they can do is to take away these products when they see them and the major hotspots for e-cigarette usage are the bathrooms but teachers can't be stationed at bathrooms indefinitely.

So It's only once in a while when administrators check up on the bathrooms that they can catch these students. And further action I want to see in the future? I don't want to see more stricter rules or anything because that's just going to lead students to work around them. But I would rather just see more of a focus on the mental aspect of it because a lot of the reason why kids are going into vaping and using e-cigarettes is because they don't care about their health or they have worsened mental health and that's the focus that I think administrators and schools need to take rather than just covering up the problem at the end of it.

J. Tyree: That's interesting. How can that be done? Is that like an educational or a counseling thing or how do you think that could be addressed?

C. Chen: I think it's both education and counseling I think it's more of the administrator being supportive to their students and saying that we understand what struggles you're going through and we want to help you. We have a mentorship in our school. It's called ignite mentorship where the high school upperclassmen talk to the underclassmen about health, balancing your life activities, education – just creating that in-school bond between students and educating them about what the harmful effects are but also giving them the option of saying here is what we can tell you. But you have the choice to do what you want to do with your body and we're just giving you all that you need to know.

J. Tyree: That's a good example of students helping fellow students. Along those lines, how are you and other students involved in reducing vape use and promoting health in other ways at school?

C. Chen: Yes, so when it comes to reducing vape usage. It's definitely difficult to do because you don't want to create hostility already right now there's a lot of hostility between the students who do vape and the students who don't it can be.

So I think the best way that as YAHL members and as students for us to help our peers is to tell them that we're there for them and even though we don't support their actions. We aren't trying to criticize them or undermine them in any sense to just to tell them that we want what's best for them and we're not devaluing their morals in any way shape or form and also just reaching out. And on like the political side of things, advocating for policy change and educating legislators, as well as educating our peers in administration in schools.

J. Tyree: How would you advise a parent or other caring adult who wants to address vaping with their child or someone like that.

C. Chen: For parents who want to prevent their children from vaping, I think you need to be very upfront and open and educative about it. Explain what vaping is, explain its harmful side effects You definitely want to avoid saying, "Like don't vape at all. It's horrible and I'll kick you out of the house if you vape." So It's more of like you give them the option of saying this is what vaping is vaping is unhealthy for you and if you are vaping. There will be consequences just setting clear boundaries and clear communication for your child is the best way.

J. Tyree: Carina, you are a very busy person with a lot of interests and things going on. With all that, why do you personally care about tobacco and vape prevention for yourself and others?

C. Chen: I think I already do have a very set-in-stone belief on how I feel about vaping and how I want vaping in my life, which is none at all.

So not only for myself I've decided what I want to be healthy, but I also want to reach out to my peers and my friends and my family and make a community that's healthier and has a positive mindset, because of a lot of the vaping use in teenagers comes from a

negative mindset which I want to avoid. And also for the younger generation, I want them to grow up and have their peer support them for a healthier lifestyle.

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- J. Tyree: It's great hearing from students who care enough about others in their school and community that they're willing to speak up, encourage and educate.
- D. Jasna: That's also what TSET Strategic Communication is all about, educating Oklahomans about things that greatly affect our health, especially in tobacco and obesity prevention, and what can be done to improve health in those areas. We have some exciting new ads coming out on youth vaping, and our communication director is here to tell us about it.
- K. Brodersen: My name is Kelli Brodersen, and I'm the Director of Strategic Communication for TSET.
- D. Jasna: Thank you for joining us. To start off, please tell us about the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative, and what parts of it address youth vaping and tobacco use?
- K. Brodersen: Well, the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative is a statewide program that is focused on preventing tobacco use, as well as obesity among youth, ages 13 to 18.
- We have three campaigns under the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative that address tobacco and vaping use among our youth. And that includes the Behind the Haze campaign, our Down and Dirty campaign, which is focused on rural teens and their tobacco use. And we also have My Life, My Quit, which is our teen cessation program for tobacco, that offers free live texting and chat support also, because we know that teens like to communicate that way. And so it makes it easier and helps them overcome the barrier of getting help to quit.
- D. Jasna: When there's messaging to youth, a lot of it could sound to them like just adult noise, like "Yada, yada, yada." What is it about these programs that you mentioned that make them effective, so they actually speak to teenagers?
- K. Brodersen: My Life, My Quit program was developed by National Jewish Hospital. And it is an evidence-based program, which really gives teens the support that they need. And so, the messaging around My Life, My Quit, is very teen centric. The imagery is very teen centric, and so kids really identify with it. And we know that kids are really into social media and texting, and all the things. So this program just makes it easier for them to tap into those free resources where they may not want to speak on the telephone.
- D. Jasna: I understand there are new ads coming out for Down and Dirty and My Life, My Quit. Can you tell us more about them?
- K. Brodersen: The new message package from My Life, My Quit, which basically is a testimonial style ad, very similar to what we do with our Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline. And it echoes the experience, the real-life experience of Oklahoma teens who have gone through the My

Life, My Quit program. So it's not a flashy ad. It really gets down to the challenges that these teens face in quitting. Adults will undertake multiple quit attempts before they're actually able to quit tobacco. And the experience is very similar for teens. And so it's helping them get over the fact that, yes, it is tough. You're going to have some setbacks, and it may take you multiple times, but there is a service out there that you can connect to, that understands that, and can give you the one-on-one support without judgment, to connect you to the quit services and the resources that you need, and that are individually tailored. And speak to these teens in the way that they want to be spoken to. They relate to it a lot better.

D. Jasna: It sounds as though, by the way you describe it, that teenagers who see these ads can almost see or hear themselves in them.

K. Brodersen: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. It sounds like them, it looks like them. Many of our My Life, My Quit ads that we've run previously/ are animated, so they're very eye catching, they're very colorful. And so they don't look like other tobacco cessation ads that you would typically think of.

D. Jasna: That sounds interesting. What's coming out for Down and Dirty?

K. Brodersen: Our new message package is called The Difference Shows, and it basically talks about the physical consequences and impact of vaping. And so it features two young ladies who are in a band together and they're practicing. And one of them talks about how she's not feeling very well, she feels short of breath, and the symptoms that she's experiencing. And her friend gently tells her, "It may be because of the vaping that you're doing."

That concept was actually tested with Oklahoma teens last spring, and it was received very well. And many of those teens expressed that they related to that conversation, and they themselves had experienced those symptoms. So, it made them rethink their vaping usage, and made them think about, "Yeah, this may be something I don't want to continue to do."

And that's the whole goal of the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative, to help them understand the consequences of what they're doing now can have immediate effects. A lot of teens think those things "Could happen to me down the line." They're thinking, "I'm young, I'm going to live forever." And the effects of vaping can be immediate. It's not a long term in the future thing. It's a "I can't focus right now, I can't breathe right now." And it's just trying to make them aware of what's happening in their own bodies. They may not be tying that back to their vaping usage. And this is just helping them to understand that, yeah, this could have real consequences for you right now in this moment.

D. Jasna: One thing I mentioned before is how it sounds like teens are able to see and hear themselves in the messaging. And with Down and Dirty, if it has a rural focus, then kids in small towns and rural areas are able to see and hear themselves.

K. Brodersen: That's absolutely correct. The landscape and the environment that they're filmed in, really reflect rural Oklahoma. They can see settings that are familiar to them, the teens

dress like them, the teens talk like them. It is really reflective of the life that they live. And when you can make it relevant like that, the uptake and the understanding, and the appreciation for the message, changes. It has a different cadence to it, the speed is different, the language, how they talk to each other, is very different than an ad that we would produce for urban teens. It's just very different. And you want to make sure that it's authentic to them.

D. Jasna: What other messaging and resources does the Healthy Youth Initiative have, that helps them make good health decisions for themselves?

K. Brodersen: We also have a vaping cessation program that has enrollment periods open at different times of the year that's called Quit the Hit. It's a vaping cessation program that's held entirely online. It's an Instagram-based, moderator-led program that kids can go through in groups. Peer groups. That has been very successful in helping many Oklahoma youth to quit vaping, over the last couple of years.

But we also have our nutrition focused brand, which is called Swap Up, which echoes many of the things that TSET is doing in our Shape Your Future program. But it's really just making kids understand that the choices that they make about how they fuel their bodies, what they eat and drink, will affect how they're able to live their everyday lives. Just like you said, hydration is key for focus.

If they're studying for a test, they need to know that water's going to be better than soda, which can make you crash. You have to know that certain things that you eat will make you feel sluggish. Greasy foods will make you feel sluggish. That's going to make it harder for you to perform well in sports. So again, the things that you feel are going to make you feel good, and taste good in the moment, are not going to be good for you later on. So, helping them make educated choices about what they eat, and giving them options that are realistic and affordable.

D. Jasna: Why is youth health, particularly with vaping, such a priority for TSET?

K. Brodersen: Our board of directors are very invested. They understand, they've seen, in their own communities, the impact that youth tobacco use and vaping use are having on their children, their friends, family. And they made it a priority for TSET. And TSET has been messaging on the effects of youth vaping and tobacco use for years through our Tobacco Stops With Me campaigns, our Protect Our Youth campaigns. And so we know the effects of cigarettes smoking. We've been able to track that for many decades. And whereas we've seen a drastic decrease in cigarette smoking in Oklahoma, youth use of e-cigarettes and vaping products, have risen. And so, in order for Oklahoma to forge a healthier future, we've got to prevent youth initiation of cigarettes, as well as e-cigarettes and vaping products as well.

D. Jasna: And finally, when you see these youth-focused ads and what they set out to do, what do you think and how does it make you feel as a mom?

K. Brodersen: As a mother of a 13-year-old and a soon to be 9-year-old, it makes me feel good just as a citizen of Oklahoma. And to know that TSET is helping parents like myself stay on top of

the evolution of the tobacco industry, and what's next, that makes me feel good. That makes me really happy to be a part of this work. But as a parent, it makes me happy to know that folks are out there helping me look out for my kids. I want my kids to be thriving and successful and healthy. I want them to live longer lives. And campaigns and programs like those that are offered through TSET, Behind the Haze, My Life, My Quit, are helping to keep them safe by teaching them that that's just not the way to go to be healthy and happy.

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- D. Jasna: Dylan speaks to the importance of Healthy Youth campaigns from his perspective.
- J. Tyree: I am looking forward to seeing them, along with other content from the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative that inspire kids to live healthier. And I really appreciate the time and dedication that Oklahomans of all ages, from elected officials to regular concerned citizens, dedicate to policy changes that reduce youth access to, and use of, vape and tobacco products. And we give special thanks to our guests today, state Rep. Cynthia Roe, students Audrina Baker and Carina Chen, and TSET's own Kelli Brodersen.
- D. Jasna: We hope you enjoyed this episode and you are invited to check out any past episodes by visiting Oklahoma.gov/tset/podcast, or anywhere you normally listen to podcasts. Take care, stay well and until next time, this is Dylan Jasna ...
- J. Tyree: And James Tyree wishing you peace ...
- D. Jasna: And better health.