Project: Opinions and Attitudes of Vermont School Principals and Nurses on Youth Vaping

Community Agency: The University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Program

Background: A rapidly emerging new trend that is turning into a nationwide epidemic for youth in the United States is the use of electronic vapor products also known as "e-cigs", "e-hookahs", "vapes", "mods", and "JUULS". There is little known about the long-term health effects of prolonged use of vapes. The rise in vape products sales and use, poses a public health threat to adolescents. The study's purpose is to assess the opinions and attitudes of school principals and nurses about youth vaping. The results will identify if any gaps exist in the youth vaping issue and further expand on existing concerns of school issues. Using this information, public health recommendations can be developed.

Methods: In 2019, an electronic survey with 24 quantitative, qualitative, and open-ended questions was developed and disseminated to Vermont school principals and nurses using UVM REDCap*. The survey link was emailed to 309 Vermont schools, kindergarten through 12th grades, and included public and private schools. The sample population consisted of 413 principals and assistant principals and 319 school nurses. Quantitative analysis was completed using REDCap and Microsoft Excel.

Results: A total of 268 responses were received which was compromised of 107 principals and assistant principals and 161 school nurses. All 14 Vermont counties were represented. Over 25% of the respondents had at least one vaping interaction with a student. 98% of the respondents feel that vaping is unhealthy, 49% think there is a youth vaping problem at their school, and almost half reported they do not have adequate resources and knowledge to address youth vaping. Over half of the respondents feel that their school should be doing more to increase awareness about dangers of youth vaping. Respondents prioritized health-related concerns as follows: 1) mental health, 2) vaping, and 3) nutrition. Other issues identified were: building resiliency in youth, stress management and burnout prevention in employees and students, and increasing cultural competence.

Conclusions: Survey results show school prevention for youth vaping is lacking and could be improved. A majority of school principals and nurses feel that their schools need to do more to educate the school community about the dangers of youth vaping and they do not have adequate resources to do so. There is a gap in knowledge, tools, and resources at schools. This implies a need for an effective prevention strategy to be implemented in schools especially one that targets youth who are at high risk for vape use. Development of a toolkit for schools, parents and students providing up-to-date information, guidance, and action steps are recommended.

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[1] Paul A. Harris, Robert Taylor, Robert Thielke, Jonathon Payne, Nathaniel Gonzalez, Jose G. Conde, Research electronic data capture (REDCap) - A metadata-driven methodology and workflow process for providing translational research informatics support, J Biomed Inform. 2009 Apr;42(2):377-81