



Press Release Rio Rancho Public Schools

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Students and E-Cigs: A Losing Proposition

The U.S. Surgeon General's office tells us that the use of e-cigarettes by high school students is soaring to epidemic proportions nationwide, and Rio Rancho is no exception. Given the health issues that can result from the use of "e-cigs," this is a troubling trend portending potential long-term consequences for our community's young people.

In the past year, the number of student disciplinary violations for tobacco use has more than doubled at all of Rio Rancho's high schools, and in some cases increased three or fourfold. Disciplinary cases involving tobacco use increased from 63 to 197 year over year at Rio Rancho High and from 35 to 185 at Cleveland High. While all types of tobacco use are included in these statistics, principals attributable the change to the increasing prevalence of e-cigs.

E-cigs are known by a variety of names, including e-hookahs, mods, and vape pens. All designed to deliver nicotine, flavoring, and other additives to the user via an inhaled aerosol. Many of these new e-cigarettes are disguised in various shapes, most notably to look like USB flash drives (the best-known of which is JUUL). Many e-cigs come in "kid-friendly" flavors designed to make drugs more appealing to young people. As with cigarettes, young people can become "hooked" on the nicotine in e-cigs and, instead of dissuading them from taking up smoking, may actually cause students to use other forms of tobacco.

E-cigs, touted in some circles as a "safer" alternative to traditional cigarettes, are anything but, according to the Surgeon General. Nicotine use during the teen years poses threats to students' developing brains, impacting learning, memory, and attention spans as well as increasing the risk for future addiction to other drugs. JUULs often contain much larger amounts of nicotine, with a single JUUL containing as much nicotine as a full pack of 20 regular cigarettes.

Even scarier, e-cigs can be altered to contain other substances, including marijuana and other dangerous and illegal drugs. As with nicotine, in some cases e-cigs contain much purer, more potent doses of the active ingredient (THC) in marijuana than a typical marijuana cigarette. A student purchasing an e-cig, or sharing an e-cig with a friend, may have no way of knowing that the device is laced with potentially dangerous drugs.

RRPS educates students about the dangers of tobacco and e-cigs in a variety of ways, including health and physical education classes, student announcements, and where appropriate in regular classes. The district also offers a drug and e-cig awareness class for parents as part of its annual series of parent safety trainings. This year's class is currently scheduled for the evening of September 12.

Parents can help by learning about the different shapes and types of e-cigarettes and the risks of using them, and by talking to their kids about why e-cigs are harmful to their health. Parents can also set a good example by being tobacco-free themselves. It's never too late to quit.

The internet has great resources to help parents learn how to talk to their children about e-cigs and to learn more about them themselves. One such resource is the U.S. Surgeon General's e-cig Web portal, <https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov>.