

October 11, 2019

**Superintendents of Public Schools, Independent School Authorities
and First Nations Schools**

Re: Vaping Awareness

Schools and the health system have a shared interest in helping students be safe, healthy and protected from harm. The increased uptake of vaping products among children and youth is a cause for increased concern for healthcare providers, school districts, community members and parents. Statistics from the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey shows that Northern Health has the highest use for non-nicotine vape users in the province and is the second highest provincially for nicotine vape use among youth.¹

In this letter, we would like to outline Northern Health's recommendations with respect to vapour products, as well as share vaping resources that are available for schools to help increase awareness, and educate children and youth on the harms associated with vaping.

Health Effects of Vaping:

- Vaping can increase exposure to harmful chemicals, which can cause lung damage.²
- Individuals that do not vape can be exposed to harmful chemicals found in the vapour/aerosol.
- Nicotine containing vaping products can lead to nicotine addiction. Nicotine affects the developing brain.
- Emerging evidence raises the possibility that vaping may lead to smoking.
- There is potentially a higher risk to using unregulated or modified vaping products.
- The long-term consequences of vaping are unknown.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Non-smokers:

- Do not start vaping, and if vaping, quit. If you want to quit or decrease your vapour use, talk to your healthcare provider (such as a doctor or nurse practitioner).
- Northern Health strongly recommends children, youth, pregnant women or non-smokers not to vape.

Smokers:

- Vaping is likely less harmful than smoking, and is likely an effective harm reduction measure for those who continue using tobacco or cannabis. However, vaping is **not harmless**. Quitting remains the healthiest choice.
- There is limited evidence of the effectiveness of e-cigarettes helping adults to quit smoking.
- Switching from vaping back to cigarette smoking is not recommended. For those interested in quitting smoking contact <https://www.quitnow.ca/> or a pharmacist for tobacco related cessation treatment and support.

¹ Balance and Connection in BC (2019). The health and wellbeing of our youth. Retrieved from: https://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/balance_and_connection.pdf

² CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (September 27, 2019). Outbreak of Lung Injury Associated with E-Cigarette Use, or Vaping. Retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/severe-lung-disease.html

For Schools:

- Smoking or vaping on or near schools (by staff, students or the public) remains illegal. Ensure the language in your smoke free grounds policies reflect the use of products that are vaped, tobacco, cannabis and other combustibles.
- Please be sure, if you are looking to post official no vaping or smoking signage, to check what specific rules may apply in your school districts. For no vaping or smoking signage visit: <https://bc.lung.ca/no-smoking-signage>
- The vaping education provided should be delivered in a culturally safe, non-judgemental way with factual information that is presented with open dialogue and an interactive format.
- Ensure a clear pathway to health care is identified so all students and staff know what to do if someone needs support relating to vaping use. Youth that are vaping are encouraged to see their family doctor.

VAPING RESOURCES:

Northern Health Vaping Awareness Presentation:

The *NH Vaping Awareness* power point presentation can help raise awareness and educate children and youth in regards to vapour related products and the potential health effects associated with vaping. See *Appendix A*

Websites:

- **Vaping Prevention Toolkit** with information for parents and teachers that includes a power point presentation, posters and FAQ sheet: <https://bc.lung.ca/how-we-can-help/vaping/vaping-prevention-toolkit>
- Health Link BC health file addressing **What is Vaping** and links to other resources: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-feature/vaping>
- Health Canada's **About Vaping** page discusses the mechanics of vaping as well as information on talking with your teens about vaping: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/vaping.html>

Health Canada's **Consider the Consequences of Vaping** awareness tour is offered across Canada to help educate teens on the health risks of vaping. This tour includes resources, tour information for students, teachers and school administration: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/vaping/consider-consequences-vaping-awareness-tour.html>

Thank you for your attention to this information related to vaping. If you have any questions, please contact your local school Primary Care Nurse or your Integrated Primary and Community Care team.

Sincerely,



Dr. Raina Fumerton, MPH
FRCPC
Acting Chief Medical Health
Officer, and Medical Health
Officer, Northwest HSDA
Northern Health



Dr. Raket Kling, MSc MPH
FRCPC
Medical Health Officer,
Northern Interior HSDA
Northern Health



Dr. Jong Kim, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer,
Northeast HSDA
Northern Health



Dr. Andrew Gray, MSc
FRCPC
Medical Health Officer
Northern Health

Appendix A

Northern Health Vaping Awareness PowerPoint

<https://innovationdevelopment.webex.com/innovationdevelopment/onstage/playback.php?RCID=87a8dc4afde3c10a8b31ddc47157abde>