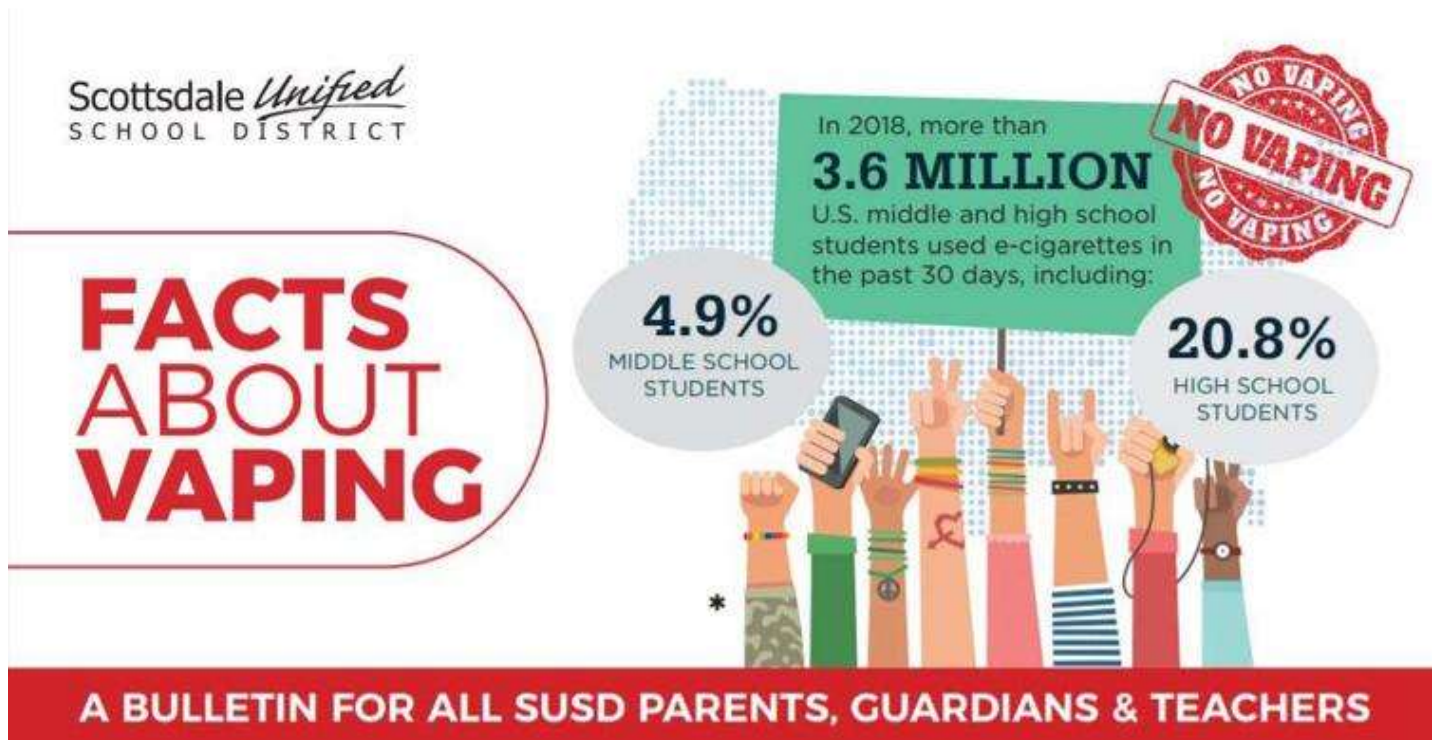


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TOP STORY

School district launches anti-vape campaign

By Wayne Schutsky, Progress Managing Editor Nov 2, 2019



Informational material has been pushed out by Scottsdale Unified School District through its social media accounts as part of a vaping awareness campaign announced on Oct. 4.

Courtesy of Scottsdale Unified School District

In the wake of warnings from local and federal health officials, the Scottsdale Unified School District launched its own awareness campaign to combat vaping amongst its students.

The district kicked off the 60-day social media campaign on Oct. 4. The district will use its social media channels and website to push out information for parents and students on the dangers vaping and e-cigarette use pose to young people's development, according to the district.

The Food and Drug Administration issued a warning on Oct. 4, directing people to stop using vaping products containing THC, the psychoactive compound in marijuana, or other vaping products bought off the street after reports that hundreds of lung injuries nationwide could be related to them.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said as of Oct. 15, 1,479 lung injury cases were associated with the use of e-cigarette or vaping nationwide.

There are at least six suspected cases in Arizona, including five in Maricopa County.

The CDC has confirmed 33 deaths in 24 states, according to the agency.

The Maricopa Integrated Health System and the Arizona Public Health Association issued their own vaping warning of the potential health risks and asked doctors to screen patients for vaping-related illnesses.

Vaping is prevalent at Scottsdale high schools.

"Vaping definitely is a very big issue, and it's problem at secondary schools nationwide and statewide," said Dr. Steven Chestnut, SUSD executive director of Support Services. "We're not exempt from that, so we're seeing that and we're working on it."

The FDA's National Youth Tobacco Survey showed that cigarette use amongst middle and high school students has dropped steadily since 2011. However, e-cigarette use has risen from less than 5 percent in 2011, to over 25 percent in 2019.

Shannon Cronn, clinical services coordinator at SUSD, told the Progress in 2018, that the district had seen a steady increase in tobacco-related referrals over the previous four years tied to vaping and that vaping was a leading cause of office referrals at all five SUSD high schools.

Scottsdale Police records also showed a spike in vaping-related violations at Scottsdale high schools throughout the city.

In February, Scottsdale Police spokesman Officer Kevin Watts said the spike in drug-related calls for service to Scottsdale high schools was tied to e-cigarette use.

According to police reports viewed by the Progress, Desert Mountain High in northern Scottsdale had 16 drug-related violations on campus in 2018, up from five in 2017.

Bella Vista Prep, a private school in northern Scottsdale, also had five drug-related violations on campus in 2017, and 17 violations in 2018.

Drug-related violations at Coronado High School rose from eight in 2017, to 17 in 2018.

There is some evidence the rise in violations in Scottsdale schools is specifically tied to the use of vaping and e-cigarette devices to use marijuana-related products containing THC – the ingredient at the center of the FDA's warning.

Between Jan. 1 and Feb. 12, 2019, all five drug-related violations at Desert Mountain High School and all six violations at Bella Vista Prep were related to use or possession of vaping or e-cigarette products containing THC, according to police department records.

The SUSD social media campaign will include links to Arizona Department of Health Services and CDC resources.

Through its social media campaign coincided with warnings from federal regulators, SUSD had already taken steps to educate students about the dangers of vaping and other harmful activities.

Last month the district hosted a presentation at Saguaro High School on the dangers of vaping and opioids that was open to all students and parents. Stephanie Siete, public information officer with Community Bridges Inc., hosted the talk.

Chestnut said high school prevention coaches and social workers also shared information about the dangers of vaping through video announcements, open houses and other school gatherings.

District assistant principals have also received training from Erika Mansur, an attorney with the Arizona Attorney General's Tobacco Enforcement Unit.

The district is also taking steps to reach younger students.

Two middle schools will be pilot-testing a new LifeSkills Training Program on the topics of tobacco/vaping, alcohol and marijuana. The program targets the major psychosocial factors that promote the initiation of risky behaviors among teens and teaches personal self-management, social skills, and other resilience skills necessary to navigate the challenges of adolescence, Chestnut explained.

November is the national Great American Smokeout campaign. SUSD high schools will be dedicating the entire month to vaping awareness and prevention.

The district also has punitive measures in place in the event students are caught vaping on campus.

Chestnut said students caught vaping could receive a short-term suspension because tobacco use is a violation of SUSD's code of conduct.

Students can have suspensions reduced by participating in Project Rewind, an early intervention program offered by the non-profit organization notMykid.