

How to Counsel Youth and Young Adults on Tobacco Use in Dental Settings



Dental professionals can play a key role in smoking and vaping prevention and treatment among youth and young adults by:

- Recognizing the signs of tobacco, vaping and alternative product use
- Advising them to quit smoking or vaping
- Offering them counseling

Youth who use tobacco are at increased risk for oral cancer, periodontal disease and other oral diseases. Vaping may increase the risk of tooth decay in youth.

Alternative Tobacco Product Use Among New York City (NYC) Youth

- 2019 data shows that compared to 3.3% for cigarette smoking, 15.2% of public high school students in NYC reported vaping with e-cigarettes.
 - In addition, 2019 data shows use of cigars and cigarillos (6.3%) and use of cannabis (17.7%) are more common than cigarette smoking.
- 2018 data shows use of hookah (5.6%) is also more common than cigarette smoking among high school students.

Youth can have misconceptions about the harms associated with using e-cigarettes and alternative products. To learn more about the different products they may use, visit on.nyc.gov/tobacco-product-guide.

Providing Guidance, Screening and Treatment

When reviewing preventative measures to maintain oral health, such as hygiene and diet, include tobacco in the conversation. Here are some examples of topics to cover:

- “Sugary drinks and snacks, smoking, and vaping are all bad for your teeth and mouth.”
- “Some behaviors, such as brushing your teeth twice per day, are good for your teeth and mouth. Other behaviors, such as smoking and vaping, are bad for your teeth and mouth.”

Starting at age 5, dental professionals can educate and counsel patients on avoiding tobacco, e-cigarette and alternative products by discussing oral health risks and other risks in an age-appropriate way:

- “Smoking can make your teeth brown and give you bad breath.”
- “The nicotine from smoking or vaping just a few times can make your body want to keep smoking or vaping.”

To learn more about how to counsel youth at different ages, visit on.nyc.gov/tobacco-anticipatory-guidance.

Starting around age 10, dental professionals can screen patients for tobacco, e-cigarette and alternative product use.

- Consider starting the conversation by asking if their friends or peers use tobacco or cannabis products, then ask them about their own use.
- Ask about a broad category as well as specific products. For example, “Have you ever tried vaping with a vape pen, e-cigarette or other device?”
- Reiterate the health risks, advise them against smoking and vaping, and give them positive feedback and reinforcement when appropriate.

In addition to guidance and screening, develop treatment plans for youth that include counseling, resources or referrals as needed, and follow up.

- Assess for nicotine dependence:
 - Does the patient have a need for increasing doses (are they developing a tolerance)?
 - Does the patient have symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, such as cravings, depressed mood, sleep disturbances, irritability, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, restlessness or increased appetite?

- Refer to and use the coaching strategies from the brochure titled “Help Your Patients Quit Smoking: A Coaching Guide” (available at on.nyc.gov/quit-smoking-coaching-guide).
- When indicated, refer patients to a health care provider for additional interventions to help them stop smoking or vaping.
- Share treatment resources with your patients, including these support services:
 - Youth who vape can participate in This Is Quitting, a text-based program from Truth Initiative, to help them quit. Youth can text “DROPTHEVAPE” to 88709 or learn more at truthinitiative.org/about-this-is-quitting.
 - Youth can visit the New York State Smokers’ Quitline at nysmokefree.com or call 866-NY-QUITS to talk to a quit coach. If they are age 18 or older, they may also qualify for a free starter kit of nicotine medications.
- Follow up with your patients frequently, as relapse and not adhering to nicotine medications are both common.
 - Young patients often have limited interactions with clinicians, so each dental visit is a good opportunity to follow up.

For more resources, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **Information on Smoking, Tobacco and E cigarette Use for Clinicians**.

