



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD
Commissioner

Dear Health Care Provider,

The popularity of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) among youth is alarming. Although the rate of cigarette smoking has declined over the last two decades to 3.3% among New York City (NYC) public high school students, the use of e-cigarettes is now at 15.2%.¹ Use of other tobacco products, such as cigars/cigarillos (6.3%),¹ and alternative products, such as cannabis (17.7%)¹ and hookah (5.6%),² is also more common than cigarette smoking.

More than 100,000 NYC children age 12 and younger are exposed to secondhand smoke at home,³ putting these children at greater risk for respiratory and ear infections, asthma attacks and other issues.⁴ Children are also exposed to harmful chemicals from non-cigarette products, such as e-cigarettes and hookah.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important to consider the use of these products as a critical respiratory exposure for youth. As a health care provider, you play a critical role in preventing and treating tobacco, e-cigarette and alternative product use (including hookah and cannabis) among your patients and their families. Note that cannabis has been legalized for adult recreational possession and use, but not for those under age 21. The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) urges you to:

1. Screen patients of all ages for exposure to tobacco smoke and vaping aerosol. Educate parents and guardians on the importance of protecting children's health and how children can resist peer pressure.
2. Starting at age 5, provide education and counseling at every visit to prevent initiation of tobacco, e-cigarette and other alternative product use.
3. Beginning at age 10, screen for tobacco, e-cigarette and other alternative product use. To encourage disclosure, ask parents and guardians to leave the exam room when age-appropriate.
4. Develop a treatment plan for children and their families that includes counseling, pharmacotherapy (as needed) and follow-up.

This action kit contains clinical tools, provider resources and patient education materials to help you educate your patients and their families about the harms of tobacco and e-cigarettes and how to prevent initiation. Your Health Department representative is available to discuss ways to integrate these tools into your practice.

Working together, we can improve the health of all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashwin Vasan'.

Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD

Commissioner

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

¹ Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. Current electronic vapor product use by grade, High School, New York City, 2019. Accessed April 8, 2022. <https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/App/Default.aspx>.

² New York State Department of Health. New York State youth tobacco survey, 2018.

³ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. EpiQuery: NYC interactive health data. NYC Child Data 2015. <https://a816-health.nyc.gov/hdi/epiquery/visualizations?PageType=ts&PopulationSource=YRBS&Topic=5&Subtopic=7>. Accessed April 8, 2022.

⁴ US Department of Health and Human Services. The health consequences of involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke: a report of the surgeon general. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44324/>. Published 2006. Accessed July 19, 2019.