**September 2020**

***This is an internal document for STEPP grantees only.***

**Op Ed**

Below is a template op-ed (also known as a guest column) that you can adapt to inform parents and other adults in your community about the dangers of youth vaping and what they can do to build on recent progress in combating it. Feel free to customize this op-ed with information or data related to your community.

This op-ed can be signed by various community members who have an interest in protecting youth from vaping. You may want to tailor the op-ed depending on who is signing it and their role in the community.

When you are finished adapting the op-ed, it should total about 600-700 words. Check local newspapers’ guidelines for submissions, including length, whether the signer needs to be local, and whether they need a photo of the signer. **Have the person who signs the op-ed submit it to your local newspaper(s).**

**Find more tips on how to submit an op-ed in the Earned Media How-To document as part of this package of materials.**

*If you have questions or need assistance, contact SE2, STEPP’s communications technical assistance provider, at* *TA@se2communications.com**.*

***Be sure to:***

* ***edit all items highlighted in yellow.***
* ***delete this introduction from your final op-ed.***
* ***add anecdotes and data from your community.***

**Let’s Ensure COVID-19 Impacts Don’t Reverse the Progress We’ve Made on Youth Vaping**

In 1964, the U.S. Surgeon General’s landmark report told Americans the truth about the dangers of smoking. Decades of research and education about the deadly products and intentional manipulation of youth by the tobacco industry followed, and it seemed youth were finally getting the message that cigarettes threatened their health and their futures.

By the early 2000s youth tobacco use declined, and it seemed we might finally be breaking the cycle of nicotine addiction.

But the tobacco industry found a new way to entice teens: vaping. Its sweet flavors and discreet devices (that could be easily hidden at school and home) attracted kids. The nicotine included in most vapes, often in very high concentrations, hooked kids and kept them coming back for more.

Even as cigarette smoking continued to decline among Colorado youth, the 2017 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, which collects responses from tens of thousands of middle- and high-school students statewide, found an explosion of vaping among middle and high school students.

Data showed that Colorado had the highest youth vaping rates in the country and served as a call to action for educators, parents, the public health community and policymakers. The most recent Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, conducted in 2019 and released just this summer, shows that, while youth vaping is still a serious concern, Colorado communities may be starting to turn the tide.

The state youth vaping rate remained essentially flat statewide, compared with a significant increase in the national youth vaping rate during the same time period. Two positive indicators of progress emerged in Colorado: Many more youth said they think vaping is risky and more than half of youth who vaped said they were trying to quit.

Now more than ever, it is important to protect youth from the health risks of vaping. The chemicals in the aerosol can damage the lungs[[1]](#footnote-0) and recent research shows that [vaping significantly raises the risk of COVID-19 to teens.](https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2020/08/vaping-linked-to-covid-19-risk-in-teens-and-young-adults.html)

[Incorporate information vaping in your community, including results for your region from the 2017 and 2019 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey to show trends and compare your regional data to the statewide statistics.]

Local efforts to reduce youth vaping are being supported by other policy changes. Colorado has prohibited vaping in indoor public places, the age to buy tobacco, including vape, has increased to 21, and Colorado retailers must get licenses to sell tobacco and vape products by July 2021, a step which will help enforce the higher age requirement.

[Add information about any local policies -- planned or passed -- aimed at addressing youth vaping in your region.]

Parents, guardians, educators and other adults who support youth have an important role in preventing youth tobacco use. Research shows that kids are less likely to vape when parents or other adults they trust share facts about the risks without judgment. Information to guide those discussions is available at [TobaccoFreeCO.org/know-the-facts](https://www.tobaccofreeco.org/know-the-facts/).

Simply having a strong relationship with a trusted adult is a protective factor against all youth substance use, including tobacco. For example, the latest Healthy Kids Colorado Survey data shows that youth who can ask their parents for help with a personal problem are less likely to vape. It also shows that youth with clear family rules are less likely to vape.

With school and other activities disrupted by COVID-19, maintaining these strong relationships can be extra challenging but it’s more important than ever. This vaping issue has become even more pressing because research shows that vaping significantly raises the risk of COVID-19 to teens.

For more information about building strong connections with youth, visit [ForwardTogetherCO.com](http://www.forwardtogetherco.com).

As a community let’s rise to the challenge and continue our progress in protecting kids.

1. Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems Key Facts; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://chronicdata.cdc.gov/Policy/Electronic-Nicotine-Delivery-Systems-Key-Facts-Inf/nwhw-m4ki/data> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)