



## THE GAZETTE'S VIEWPOINT

### We must address teen vaping craze

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Teen consumption of nicotine vapor throughout the country rose 10 percent in the past 30 days over a similar period a year ago. Tuesday's announcement by the National Institute for Drug Abuse marks the largest increase of any substance use in the agency's 43 years of tracking.

The youth vaping craze undermines decades of progress toward tobacco-use reduction and cessation among teens. **Mayor John Suthers**, the **Colorado Springs City Council**, **Gov.-elect Jared Polis**, and all state legislators should quickly address this problem.

The announcement led **U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams** to issue an advisory Tuesday urging state and local restrictions on vaping products. Adams suggests taxes and indoor vaping bans.

Nicotine, Adams said, is "very and uniquely harmful" to the developing brains of young people. It can impair learning and memory and "prime the brain" for other addictions, he explained.

Amid these developments, Colorado legislators would be wise to take the advice in outgoing **Gov. John Hickenlooper's** Nov. 2 proclamation about vaping.

"The Executive Orders enacted by Governor Hickenlooper... are, we believe, the best in the country," said Colorado Springs native **Dr. Martin J. Murphy**, chief executive officer of the national **CEO Roundtable on Cancer**, in an email to *The Gazette's* editorial board Tuesday.

Murphy said Hickenlooper's leadership to combat vaping "**matches vision with courage.**"

A free society should allow adults to smoke and vape all they want. Some nicotine addicts consider vaping a safer alternative and a possible means of quitting an unpleasant and dangerous habit. Conversely, children do not and cannot have all the liberties of adults. Local and state governments should protect them a growing temptation of social pressure that says vaping is harmless and cool. We don't need more generations developing lifelong addictions because of ill-informed decisions made during vulnerability years of childhood.

Hickenlooper's order admonishes Colorado for having the highest incidence of teen vaping in the country.

Colorado's problem is worse than it sounds. The **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** finds Colorado teens vape at twice the national average of their peers in other states.

This means Colorado can expect a future marked by higher-than-average drug and alcohol abuse, arrested brain development, cancer, and other diseases.

“Vaping can lead to nicotine addiction, and can be associated with other risky behaviors that can affect a teen’s health,” said **Dr. Tista Ghosh**, *Interim Chief Medical Officer* for the **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment**. “Our state data shows that teens who vape are more likely to use alcohol, drugs and engage in risky sexual behaviors.”

Ghosh’s department reports nicotine smoked or vaped has “a negative effect on adolescent brain development, causing lasting cognitive and behavioral impairments, including effects on working memory and attention.”

Additionally, the department cites studies that prove “vape products can contain dangerous toxins, including heavy metals and chemicals known to cause cancer and other diseases.”

Hickenlooper’s order directs the Department of Revenue to conduct double compliance checks to ensure retailers don’t sell tobacco products to minors.

The order extends all smoking prohibitions on state property to include vaping. It also directs the state to issue a health advisory and to investigate links between vaping and use of alcohol and drugs.

Hickenlooper’s memo suggests the 2019 legislature take up a six-step “**Colorado Tobacco Prevention Blueprint**,” which includes:

- ***Extend the excise tax on tobacco products to all vaping products.***
- ***Require licensure of retailers who sell vaping products (similar to marijuana and alcohol).***
- ***Require internet retailers of vape products to implement age verification procedures, billing and shipping address matching, and use of mail carriers that offer point-of-delivery age verification.***
- ***Update the Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act to restrict use of vape in public places that prohibit cigarette and pot use.***

Those are solid recommendations. Two others would affect adult consumers, raising concerns that cannot be readily dismissed: Raise the minimum age to buy tobacco and vape products to 21; and prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco and vaping products in Colorado.

The surgeon general, the governor, the past and present directors of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the National Institute for Drug Abuse, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the **CEO Roundtable on Cancer**, and others, all warn of a large and growing problem with teens and even pre-teens vaping tobacco.

Local and state politicians should listen to these experts and take swift action. They should combat this latest menace that threatens the health of our youths and the quality of our future.

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