

The dangers of smoking as a developing teenager

Good morning,

I know all of you would rather be learning math right now or doing a chemistry test, but what I have to share today is really important. In my opinion, it's even more important than anything you have ever learnt in class. That's a joke.

My name is Dr. Williams and I am a cardiologist working at Toronto General Hospital. I have also been the lead researcher with the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada for over 20 years. In all my years as a doctor, I have never seen something do more damage for developing teenagers than an e-cigarette. A lot of you might know it as a vape. It might seem like it's way better than a traditional cigarette, but that's far from the truth.

All of you are still developing. Your brains are growing and changing every single day. It's so important to stay clear from any kind of drug. When you vape, you might not feel it in the moment, but the chemicals you inhale have long-lasting consequences for your organs.

More and more teenagers are experimenting with vaping, and it's scaring the medical community. A study found a 74 per cent increase of current vape use among 16- to 18-year-olds in Canada from 2017 to 2018. These companies come up with all these cool flavours so they can attract you and your pocket. If you want dessert, I promise you, it's so much better to eat the actual thing, so long as you're still eating an apple a day. Flavours might not seem like a big deal, but it's one of the main reasons why young teenagers are drawn to e-cigarettes. In one study over 90 per cent of youth and young adults reported their first e-cigarette was flavoured. It's not your fault. It's sad to see these companies target the most vulnerable members of our society, but it is your job to educate yourself.

Some people think that e-cigarettes are much healthier than the traditional ones. I've heard this many times. But, it's a misconception. The medical community has been raising the alarm for a very long time. Vaping is linked to respiratory injury. There have been several thousand cases of severe vaping related lung illnesses across North America. Drugs don't come without consequences. For many years, doctors and teachers have been educating students about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine and a whole lot of other substances. Vaping is no better. Don't let someone fool you into thinking it's a wellness gadget.

I am here today because I care about you. Doctors are not your enemy. We want you all to have lots of fun, but fun shouldn't cost you your health. You need your heart and lungs to live.

Harold Williams
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Every day, I see patients who are struggling to breathe or are in incredible pain because of drugs. Lung cancer is on the rise. More and more young people are being diagnosed with bronchitis. It's difficult to imagine the severity of these conditions when they're just words you see in your science textbooks. Believe me, it's bad. You don't want to be there.

What I want you all to do is make a promise to yourselves. If one day, you want to be traveling the world, retiring in a beautiful island with the love of your life or whatever it is that you desire, promise yourself that you will not vape. We don't know enough about it. We can help you as doctors, but don't experiment with your young bodies. Allow yourselves to grow freely. You all are the future. We rely on you to fix so many of the problems the adult world created. Let's take care of our bodies and stay away from substances that cause so much harm.

Thank you for your time. This was a really important conversation to have. Please protect yourselves and your friends. It's actually that serious.

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