*Editor’s Note: Asterisk (\*) indicates name change to protect the identity of the student.*

“I vaped at first mainly just to do cool tricks. But now it’s like I need to hit something with nicotine at least once a day,” Chad\*, a student at Roberson, said.

According to the FDA, almost 10.7 million teenagers are negatively affected by the use of e-cigarettes. This includes the use of and potential addiction to the various types of devices. And because peer pressure remains common among teenagers today, experts are predicting that number to continue to rise.

“I started about a year ago. I saw everyone else getting a Juul and wanted to get myself one so I could see what all the hype was about,” Chad said.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 38 percent of high schoolers and 13 percent of middle schoolers have tried a vape product as of 2018.

Due to the increase of e-cigarettes amongst teenagers, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared teenage use of e-cigarettes an epidemic on Sept. 12. The FDA gave major companies including Vuse, Blu and JUUL 60 days to find a way to eliminate the use by teenagers or they would face stiff fines and possible other legal action.

The FDA has issued posters to be posted in public high school bathrooms declaring that ‘There’s an epidemic spreading’ to try and curb the use by teenagers.

Despite having to be 18 years old to purchase a vape product, studies show that children as young as 12 are still finding ways to vape. And because vapes are odorless and resemble flash drives, a growing number of students are vaping in schools and even during classes.

“I don’t vape in class, but most people who do just use their shirt sleeves and other things to hide while vaping,” Chad said.

According to CBS News, the company JUUL says they provide flavors that may help adult smokers quit smoking traditional cigarettes. Juul pod flavors include range from mint, mango, and creme to fruit, cucumber and menthol. The FDA is threatening to ban Juul pod flavors including fruit and mango due to the popularity of teen users which could cause JUUL financial loses.

Vape Wild, a company from Dallas, Texas, sells flavors including vanilla, blue raspberry, white chocolate, strawberry macarons, and many other dessert-flavored varieties. Roberson social worker Ami Greene believes these flavors and their packaging intentionally attracts teenage users.

“I honestly feel that vaping is being marketed to teenagers. I feel like when you offer cotton candy flavored vape juice and make the bottles with little cartoons on them, they become like collector items.  [These companies] are preying on kids and teenagers,” Greene said.

University of North Carolina at Asheville freshman Tommy Watkins believes that vaping is safer than smoking cigarettes.

“For people concerned for their health, vaping does not have anywhere near the amount of bad chemicals in it like carcinogens,” Watkins said.

Experts disagree.

JUUL’s “fruity flavors” of pods, including fruity medley and mango, are considered the most dangerous type of pods by the CDC because they include a carcinogen called acrylonitrile. Acrylonitrile causes both lung and prostate cancer and as well as many other health risks, including problems in the development of organs, blood formation and reproductive systems.

According to the Center on Addiction, 1 in 6 high school students have used an e-cigarette in the past 30 days,  And because one Juul pod contains the same amount of nicotine as one full pack of cigarettes, this amount of nicotine can cause addiction, attention problems and depression in teenagers and young adults.

“I am fully aware of the effects, but it’s just really hard to stop once you’re hooked,” Chad said.

Some vape juice flavors even include diacetyl, a chemical linked to lung diseases that can lead to dry cough, shortness of breath, wheezing and lethargy.

“I just wish people wouldn’t vape. My father died of lung cancer from smoking, and people think vaping is better. But it’s not,” Greene said.

Electronic Cigarettes (e-cigarettes) were made by Hon Lik after his father’s death of lung cancer in 2003. But in just the last two years, e-cigarettes have exploded in popularity, especially in schools and on campuses. JUUL’s sales of e-cigarettes increased by 614 percent between 2016 and 2017, allowing them to become a $16-billion company.

Roberson administrators and counselors want the school to also provide a place for students to get help. Students can talk to counselors or with Greene to form a plan of action. This plan can be as elaborate as getting professional help or having weekly check-ins with the school counselors.

“If they want help, I will work with them to find a resource for vaping sensation. We look in the community for resources like a counselor and we provide information about the effects vaping. We can brainstorm ideas as well and form a plan of action from there,” Green said.

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According to the “American Journal of Medicine” teens and adults are four times more likely to start smoking cigarettes if they vape. The Center of Addiction argues that e-cigarettes are actually not a proven method to help someone quit smoking, in fact, they reported that vapes are typically used in addition to smoking cigarettes.

Nicotine is not the only ingredient included in JUULs and their vape juice. Pods include five ingredients: glycerol, propylene glycol, nicotine, benzoic acid, and food-grade flavoring. Glycerol can also be found in antifreeze used in automobiles.. In addition to the vape juice and nicotine, individuals using these products are inhaling a variety of different types of metals including nickel, aluminum, tin and lead.