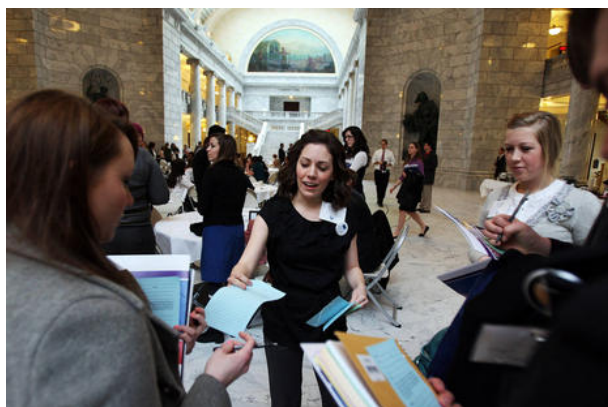


# Deseret News

## Utah teens are experimenting with e-cigarettes

By Wendy Leonard , Deseret News

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McKenna Weir, a senior at Brigham Young University, helps organize volunteers from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network to meet with legislators at the Utah Capitol in Salt Lake City, Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2012. (Ravell Call, Deseret News)

SALT LAKE CITY — A battery-powered device as small as a No. 2 pencil is becoming a big enough deal that the Utah PTA is taking aim.

The local organization of parents and teachers on Tuesday put electronic cigarettes at the top of its list, along with alcohol, drugs and other tobacco products, hoping to get state leaders to take notice of increasing trends among children and teens.

Nearly 8 percent of Utah's twelfth-graders reported they had experimented with e-cigarettes and 3 percent had used them in the past 30

days, according to a 2011 Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health [survey](#) of more than 55,000 Utah school children, conducted by the Utah Department of Health. For the first time, the agency this year paid to add questions concerning e-cigarettes, however, the data remains unpublished at this time.

Among 19- to 24-year-olds, 25 percent reported having tried e-cigarettes and 9 percent continued to use them, according to the health department.

"There's a lot of danger associated with these cigarettes," Utah PTA President Gainell Rogers said. "It is a safety issue for our children as well as a health issue."

Limited research on e-cigarettes makes it difficult to assess those risks. The lack of evidence has prompted the American Cancer Society, and other advocacy organizations, to refrain from taking a stance on e-cigarette use. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has found that e-cigarettes do contain harmful levels of nicotine, a substance the agency classifies as a stimulant drug.

E-cigarette manufacturers claim the product is safer than cigarettes, as a vaporized mixture of various chemicals and low amounts of nicotine actually enters the body through inhalation, instead of a steady stream of straight nicotine from an ignited, tobacco-filled cigarette. The product simulates the look, feel and flavor of smoking, according to a website promoting Green Nicotine, an e-cigarette brand previously sold at the Fashion Place Mall.



Sharlene Bozack, Chief Government Relations Officer for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Great West Division, speaks as cancer survivors and volunteers meet for Utah State Legislative Education and Lobby Day at the Utah Capitol in Salt Lake City, Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2012. (Ravell Call, Deseret News)



Cancer survivors and volunteers from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network meet for Utah State Legislative Education and Lobby Day at the Utah Capitol in Salt Lake City, Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2012. (Ravell Call, Deseret News)

"There is no safe level of tobacco smoke," said David Neville, spokesman for the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program at the Utah Department of Health.

In smoking a cigarette, he said, a user generally knows how much nicotine is being consumed. "They know if they are a half-a-pack-a-day smoker. When it comes to an electronic cigarette, you just don't know. You just keep on smoking," Neville said.

Some consumers view an e-cigarette as a nicotine replacement, a method to help them quit smoking. But

Neville argued that the device is not compatible with a step-therapy program because it delivers a specific level of nicotine to the user and can be refilled when emptied.

"It's confusing to a smoker or someone who is trying to quit," he said, noting that nicotine gums and patches are offered in varying nicotine levels and help people kick the habit.

A legislative committee on Monday heard public comment on whether e-cigarettes and hookah pipes should be defined in current state law as smoking. HB245 seeks to amend the state's Indoor Clean Air Act, which was first passed in 1995 when e-cigarettes were not available.

In March 2010, New Jersey became the first state in the country to institute a public ban of e-cigarettes. Several other states and international jurisdictions have followed suit in the past year, according to a white paper published in December by the Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy.



Cancer survivors and volunteers from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network meet for Utah State Legislative Education and Lobby Day at the Utah Capitol in Salt Lake City, Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2012. (Ravell Call, Deseret News)

The bill considered in Utah would ban e-cigarette and hookah use in public places, providing what Neville said would be a "healthy, happy environment for kids to be raised in.

"This is our best shot at doing that," he said.

The Utah Department of Health and Utah's PTA support the bill as a proactive approach to keeping Utah's children free of the potential effects of tobacco.

"The PTA is about children, but we're also about children's issues," Rogers said. "We are concerned about their family life, about issues concerning their health, issues concerning their safety. We attack a myriad of issues because we're concerned about children."

Utah's tobacco cessation program, 1-800-QUIT-NOW, provides free therapy to most callers.



Megan Passey applauds a speaker as cancer survivors and volunteers from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network meet for Utah State Legislative Education and Lobby Day at the Utah Capitol in Salt Lake City, Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2012. (Ravell Call, Deseret News)

*E-mail:* [wleonard@desnews.com](mailto:wleonard@desnews.com)

*Twitter:* [wendyleonards](https://twitter.com/wendyleonards)

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