

Thanks to all who were able to participate in the webinar, “Parenting Now: Catch My Breath- What Parents Should Know About Teens, ‘Tweens, and Vaping” on November 19th, 2020. If you were unable to attend, or would like the chance for an encore, the full recording is now available via a link on the Coalition home page, www.hwp4y.org. Here’s a brief summary:

In her welcoming remarks, Dr. Gina Kahn, Coalition Director, provided some local context for the importance of this topic. Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey suggests that the prevalence of e-cigarette/ vaping product use has risen significantly over the past five years with over 30% of high school students surveyed in 2019 acknowledging that they had vaped in the past 30 days. Youth’s perception of vaping among their peers has also continued to increase, with over 90% of the high school students surveyed in 2019 believing that kids their age vape.

Our guest speaker, CATCH My Breath Program Director Marcella Bianco, presented information to parents and community members on the CATCH My Breath Vaping Prevention Program, which focuses on bringing folks together to work towards creating a healthy environment for kids and helping young people develop healthy habits early in life. Her presentation defined how e-cigarettes work and the dangers involved in youth use, examined the extent of the youth vaping epidemic and its root causes, and addressed the health effects of vaping and its relationship with the COVID-19 pandemic. She also outlined some of the signs to look for to identify if a child/student is vaping and ways that parents, guardians and caregivers can approach the subject with youth, which emphasized four key points for having a successful conversation about vaping. Marcella talked about the need for continued support to restrict youth access to nicotine products through education, prevention, and policy change and how to get involved in your community, from an individual level all the way up to federal level. The webinar also offered a “School Perspective,” which featured guest speakers Kiel Williams, Minnechaug Regional High School President, MRHS Class of 2022, and Heidi Drawec, Assistant Principal/ Dean of Students, Minnechaug Regional High School, who offered their thoughtful insights on teens and ‘tweens vaping.

Kiel advises that vaping is an issue in his community and that young people can easily hide what they are doing and because of that, parents are blind to what is truly happening. “Especially in schools, I see so many people going into the bathroom, and sometimes in class, vaping and teachers are none the wiser. I also see many of my friends using vapes and they tell me that it’s hard to breathe, that they can’t do the things that they used to do.” Kiel encourages open communication and sticking by their side.

“Sometimes a person who is in trouble just wants someone to listen to them. That’s why as the friend and as the parent, it is your job to stand by them and understand the issue. Communication is not only talking, it’s also the way you interact with other people, for example body language. Show the person who vapes what it can do to them, speak the truth and give them the facts.” Kiel believes that parents and youth should watch the webinar because vaping is dangerous for people, especially the youth. “By watching the webinar you are educating yourself on what to look out for. In turn, you become more aware of how the youth are using the vapes. Not only that, but when you watch the webinar you will get the perspective from a student who has actually seen what a vape can do to a person.”

Marcella emphasized the need to stop vaping immediately and outlined a few cessation resources available to help. Kerri O’Connor, Family Resource Coordinator for the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District, provided a number of smoking cessation and mental health resources that are also available. The full family/community resource guide can be accessed at www.hwp4y.org. As the program concluded, participants were reminded of opportunities to become involved in various Coalition activities, including Youth Mental Health First Aid courses that are scheduled periodically throughout the year and can be arranged for groups of five or more adults upon request. Participants

were asked to complete an evaluation survey, and encouraged to suggest topics of interest that may be offered in the future.

Thanks again for your interest in this important topic. We look forward to keeping the conversation going at future Coalition programs and events and hope you will join us for our upcoming programs!