



# Durbin, Duckworth ask Illinois Superintendents about e-cigarette use by middle and high school students

May 30 2018 11:45 AM

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) are reaching out to Superintendents across the state and requesting information regarding what Illinois middle and high schools are experiencing with respect to student use of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and vaping products, such as the JUUL vaping device. Nationwide, between 2011 and 2015, the use of these dangerous and addictive nicotine products among high school students increased more than ten-fold—from 1.5 percent to 16 percent.

**“From aggressively marketing cigarette and tobacco products near schools, to shamelessly using cartoon characters to entice children, and producing their tobacco products in kid-friendly candy and fruit flavors, it is no secret that big tobacco companies will stop at nothing to hook young people on their addictive and dangerous products,”** Durbin and Duckworth wrote in the letter to Illinois Superintendents. **“While it remains an open question whether e-cigarettes can play a role in helping adult smokers to quit cigarettes, there is certainly no role for them to play in our nation’s schools—and yet that is exactly where they are turning up.”**

Thanks to enhanced prevention and awareness policies, cigarette smoking among high school students is at record lows—dropping from 28 percent in 2000 to eight percent in 2016. However, these gains are being jeopardized because of e-cigarettes, which are now the most popular form of tobacco use among youth.

E-cigarette use among teenagers has become so prevalent that a number of high schools administrators across the country have been forced to take dramatic action in response. Some schools have banned USB drives from their campuses, as it is often difficult to differentiate them from the JUUL vaping device. Some schools have placed limitations on the number of students that can use the bathroom at one time, as young people

congregate in bathroom stalls to secretly vape. Some schools have been forced to install additional security cameras in an effort to crack down on student use of e-cigarettes.

To help combat this alarming public health scourge, Durbin and Duckworth have pressed the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to expeditiously regulate these e-cigarette products and remove kid-friendly flavors from the market, such as gummy bear, cotton candy, cookies ‘n cream, and whipped cream. They have also supported federal awareness efforts to educate the public about tobacco harms.

Full text of all of the letters that were sent are available [here](#). Full text of one of the letters is also available below:

May 25, 2018

Dear Superintendent:

Over the past few years, there has been an alarming increase in vaping or electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use among high school students nationwide. In Illinois, 27 percent of high school students now use these products. We write today to request information regarding what our Illinois middle and high schools are experiencing with respect to student use of these dangerous and addictive nicotine products.

From aggressively marketing cigarette and tobacco products near schools, to shamelessly using cartoon characters to entice children, and producing their tobacco products in kid-friendly candy and fruit flavors, it is no secret that big tobacco companies will stop at nothing to hook young people on their addictive and dangerous products. The good news is that, thanks to enhanced prevention and awareness policies, cigarette smoking among high school students is at record lows—dropping from 28 percent in 2000 to 8 percent in 2016. The bad news is that, much to our dismay, these gains are being jeopardized because of non-cigarette tobacco products—especially cigars and e-cigarettes with kid-appealing flavors.

Between 2011 and 2015, the use of e-cigarettes among high school students increased more than ten-fold—from 1.5 percent to 16 percent. While e-cigarette use by high school students declined slightly to 11.3 percent in 2016, e-cigarettes remain the most popular form of tobacco use among youth. This is especially concerning given that the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that there is “substantial evidence” that e-cigarette use increases the risk that youth will try cigarettes, and “conclusive evidence” that most e-cigarettes contain and emit numerous potentially toxic substances.

E-cigarette use among teenagers has become so prevalent that a number of high schools administrators across the country have been forced to take dramatic action in response. Some schools have banned USB drives from their campuses, as it is often difficult to differentiate them from certain vaping devices. Some schools have placed limitations on the number of students that can use the bathroom at one time, as young people congregate in bathroom stalls to secretly vape. Some schools have been forced to install additional security cameras in an effort to crack down on student use of e-cigarettes.

To help combat this alarming public health scourge, we have pressed the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to expeditiously regulate these e-cigarette products and remove kid-friendly flavors from the market. We have also supported federal awareness efforts to educate the public about tobacco harms.

We write today to understand what your district is experiencing with respect to student use of e-cigarettes. We would greatly appreciate answers to the following questions by June 29, 2018 (and please feel free to ask your schools to provide as much additional context or anecdotal information as they see fit):

1. Have your middle or high schools noticed an increase of e-cigarette use by their students over the past few years? If so, what are the most popular devices and/or accompanying flavors?
2. Have your middle or high schools had to impose new rules, regulations, or practices in order to better contain or monitor the use of e-cigarettes among students?
3. Have parents of your middle and high school students raised this issue with your principals or teachers?
4. Have your middle or high schools taken any additional steps to educate students about the harms of tobacco use, as well as the addictive nature of nicotine found in e-cigarette flavorings? Please describe any specific sessions, events, or initiatives.
5. Do your middle and high school principals or teachers have any idea where their under-18 students are purchasing e-cigarettes? Are there convenient stores, or vaping stores, that sell these products near high schools?
6. Is there anything that your middle or high school principals and teachers think Congress could be doing at the federal level to help in your efforts to protect a new generation of children from becoming addicted to nicotine?

While it remains an open question whether e-cigarettes can play a role in helping adult smokers to quit cigarettes, there is certainly no role for them to play in our nation's schools—and yet that is exactly where they are turning up. We appreciate any information you and your high schools may be able to provide on this important subject. Please send your responses electronically to [Jessica\\_McNiece@durbin.senate.gov](mailto:Jessica_McNiece@durbin.senate.gov) and [Josie\\_Villanueva@duckworth.senate.gov](mailto:Josie_Villanueva@duckworth.senate.gov). Thank you.

Sincerely,