

Fall 2024

# THE ANTIDOTE

News and Notes from the Blue Ridge Poison Center



## New Vape Dangers Lurk as Kids Return to School

As kids head back to school, the tobacco industry is ramping up their marketing of e-cigarettes and vapes designed to appeal to children and adolescents. To date, the FDA has authorized the sale of only 34 products, most of which are tobacco-flavored. But thousands of unauthorized products are widely available in kid-friendly flavors such as “frozen smash berry,” “bangin’ banana” and “butterscotch.” Some of the latest disposable vaping devices even connect to a smartphone via Bluetooth. They can be used to play video games like Pac Man or Tetris. Other products are sold bundled with candy, lip gloss, or similar items designed to attract and lure young people.

Almost all of these products are illegal. Yet they remain readily available at stores and online across the United States. Manufacturers of e-cigarettes and vapes even sell their products on social media platforms like TikTok. Most manufacturers are located overseas—particularly in China—and therefore difficult to regulate.

### What is the problem?

The nicotine content in these products is deceptively high. Some contain as much nicotine as 20 packs of cigarettes or more. Nicotine is a highly addictive drug and can harm adolescent brain development, particularly the parts of the brain responsible for attention, memory and learning.

According to [Tobacco Free Kids](#), over 2.1 million kids are using e-cigarettes; 90% of them use flavored products, and 1 in 3 vape frequently or every day.

Earlier this month, the Blue Ridge Poison Center director Dr. Christopher Holstege told WVIR Channel 29 News about an [upward trend in poison center calls](#) about vape products. “In 2020, we had 27 calls regarding vaping products,” Dr. Holstege said. “2021, there were 26, but 2022 we had 73 and last year in 2023, we had 99 calls related to vaping products.”

**YOUTH VAPING: STILL A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

**2.1 MILLION** KIDS USE E-CIGARETTES

**90 PERCENT** USE FLAVORED PRODUCTS

**6000+** ILLEGAL E-CIGARETTES ON THE MARKET

**FDA: PROTECT KIDS AND ELIMINATE ALL ILLEGAL E-CIGARETTES NOW.**

CAMPAIGN for TOBACCO-FREE Kids

Continued next page



Inside: *Are online pharmacies safe?*

**What can be done?** Here is some advice for parents to help prevent adolescents from using e-cigarettes and vape products:

- ◆ **Share your concern.** Teens really do listen when you talk to them openly and honestly about the dangers of nicotine and other drugs. For a guide on how to start and what to say, visit the American Lung Association’s [Parent Conversation Guide](#)
- ◆ If your child vapes, **encourage and support them to quit.** Talk to their health care provider about getting help. You can also call 1-800-QUIT-NOW and visit [Teen.smokefree.gov](http://Teen.smokefree.gov) for more help.
- ◆ **Make your home tobacco-free.** Ensure your child is not exposed to secondhand smoke or aerosol from any tobacco products, including vapes.
- ◆ **Be a good role model.** If you use tobacco, it's never too late to quit. For free help, visit [CDC.gov/Quit](http://CDC.gov/Quit) or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.



Every adult can help by [signing the petition](#) sponsored by Tobacco Free Kids. Tell the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that they must “make full use of all available enforcement tools, including fines, product seizures, import restrictions and criminal prosecutions.”

## POISON TRIVIA

*Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup* was a 19th century product marketed as a medicine to calm fussy babies. It resulted in thousands of deaths of babies and children. Why?

Answer on page 3

## Online Pharmacies: Convenient and Private, But Are They Safe?

More than half of all U.S. adults have used an online pharmacy, according to the [National Association of Boards of Pharmacy](#) (NABP), and the numbers are growing. Online shopping is valued for its increased sense of privacy and convenience. Shoppers who live far from a pharmacy, who work evening shifts, have limited transportation options, or who have mobility issues can especially benefit from buying medicines online. There can be cost savings, too. *But is it safe?*

Maybe not, says the NABP. Of the 35,000 active online pharmacy websites, **95% were found to be operating illegally.** This means the sellers may not be complying with safety standards or other laws. The medications they produce may be falsified or counterfeit. *Falsified medicines* are fake medicines that are designed to look like real medicines. *Counterfeit medicines* are medicines that do not comply with intellectual-property rights or trademark laws. Both can have serious risks.

According to the [Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#) (ASOP), 24% of Americans who have purchased medications from an online pharmacy have been exposed to harmful or substandard products.

Continued next page



Here's a recent example: In December 2023, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) investigated a flood of complaints about Ozempic (semaglutide) after many users reported adverse effects. Semaglutide is an injectable medication used to treat diabetes. It is also used for weight management. The FDA seized thousands of units of counterfeit semaglutide. Furthermore, the needles from the fake products were also found to be counterfeit. This meant that the sterility of the needles could not be confirmed, presenting an increased risk of infection. [Read the FDA warning.](#)

### What are the concerns with falsified or counterfeit medications?

- The products are often made in unsafe, unregulated conditions. As a result, many have been found to be contaminated with harmful substances including mold, heavy metals, pesticides, and other poisons.
- They may contain little or no active ingredients. This can jeopardize someone who depends on certain medications to manage serious health conditions.
- They may contain too much of the active ingredient, or other active ingredients which are not listed. This can lead to overdose, allergic reactions, or other adverse events. In particular, counterfeit pills often contain fentanyl or methamphetamine which can be deadly.
- Buyers may be at increased risk of identity theft or credit card fraud.

### Shop safely

The NABP has a free [Verify Before You Buy](#) website. Simply enter the website address of any online pharmacy to ensure it is legitimate, licensed, and safe. The website also offers tips for spotting safe sites, and you can confidentially report any suspicious sites.



We recommend visiting the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's [One Pill Can Kill](#) website for information specifically about fake drugs which are laced with fentanyl.



**Poison Trivia Answer:** Unknown to parents, each bottle contained a dangerous amount of morphine and alcohol. Public outcry over this and other poisonings led Congress to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906. The Act required the listing of certain potentially harmful ingredients on product labels. Over time, this grew into the 1960 Federal Hazardous Substances Labeling Act—still in effect today.

The [Blue Ridge Poison Center](#) is affiliated with University of Virginia Health. Other funding sources include the Virginia Department of Health and HRSA. We are accredited by America's Poison Centers. Proudly serving the Commonwealth since 1978. [Join the mailing list](#) to receive this quarterly newsletter.

