

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 53: Emerging Tobacco Products and Studying Vaping Behaviors

August 4, 2025

Summary: As cigarette smoking gradually declines in Oklahoma and the U.S., other nicotine products are being marketed to attract and addict new consumers – especially youth and young adults. What are these products, what should be known about them and how can Oklahomans addicted to any tobacco product find help to quit for good? Episode 53 of the TSET Better Health Podcast explores and answers these questions with guests Matt Glanville of the American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network and TSET Brand Manager Chase Harvick. In addition, Dr. Emily Hebert of the TSET Health Promotion Research Center explains her innovative new five-year research grant to study behaviors and trends of young adults who vape from information gathered in real time.

All music licensed through PremiumBeat. Full transcripts and music credits available at oklahoma.gov/tset/podcast.

[Theme music]

James Tyree: Hello everyone, I hope you are having a great day. Welcome to Episode 53 of the TSET Better Health Podcast. I am your host, James Tyree, associate director of Integrated Communications at TSET ...

Sarah Carson: And I am Sarah Carson, campaign manager for TSET. The podcast digs into several topics regarding the health and wellness of Oklahomans. So far in 2025, we have discussed walking and bicycling, enjoying healthier foods and what we've learned about staying healthy since the pandemic. But today we will revisit tobacco products and their use.

Cigarette smoking continues to be the No. 1 cause of preventable death in our state. Each year, about 7,500 Oklahomans lose their lives due to tobacco use. Fortunately, smoking is in a long, steady decline. *Unfortunately*, vapes and new, emerging tobacco products continue to enter the market and hook new people on nicotine, especially youth and young adults.

But what are some of these products, and are they really dangerous?

J. Tyree: That's an important question that a lot of parents and educators are asking, and one that many students are curious about. And what about vaping, which has been around for a few years? A lot of youths and young adults who may have had no interest in cigarettes have instead picked up vaping.

I recently spoke with an assistant professor at the TSET Health Promotion Research Center who is about to begin a five-year study on how, when and where young adults vape and to learn more about the vape products they use. She is excited about this research and I think you could be, too, after hearing more about this study.

S. Carson: There's also exciting news from the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline for anyone who wants to quit the use of any nicotine product for good. You will want to stick around to hear more on that.

J. Tyree: But first we'll address the question Sarah just asked about new and emerging tobacco and nicotine products. The tobacco industry seems to come up with something new all the time, what should we look for now, and are they really something to be concerned about?

S. Carson: Let's find out from a conversation we had recently with an expert on the topic.

Matt Glanville: I'm Matt Glanville, and I am the Oklahoma and Arkansas government Relations Director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network.

S. Carson: What exactly *is* the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and what do you do for them?

M. Glanville: Sure. So the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, or ACS CAN, as we are commonly known, is the 501(c) advocacy arm of the American Cancer Society, and we advocate at the state and local and federal level to further our mission of ending cancer as we know it. So we do that through a number of areas, including access to care, Medicaid policy, and of course tobacco and addressing the toll of tobacco through regulation, taxation, cessation and prevention and so forth.

S. Carson: The tobacco industry is always creating new products to market and sell, especially to younger people. One emerging type of products is called heat-not-burn. Can you tell us a bit about them — what they are, how they work and why some find them appealing?

M. Glanville: Yeah. So heat-not-burn products or what are sometimes called heated cigarettes are similar in their appearance to an e-cigarette product, but they contain sort of dry leaf tobacco that has been treated in such a way that it does not catch fire. So when it is combined with a heating element, it produces an aerosol that can then be inhaled into the lungs, which is the vehicle for the nicotine. For some consumers, the draw of this product is that it has been designed to be more similar in its feel and experience to the inhalation of a cigarette product. It is just a different nicotine delivery system. However, that contains many of the same dangerous chemicals that we see in other products including cigarettes.

S. Carson: Are there other emerging tobacco or vape products that we should be aware of?

M. Glanville: So I think when we talk about emerging tobacco products, aside from these heated tobacco products and heated cigarettes, we often think of e-cigarettes, which have been around for a little while now, and those of us who work in this space are all familiar with

e-cigarettes, but one thing that we've recently seen is just the explosion and the use and popularity of these nicotine pouch products, which is very concerning, particularly among young men. These products have proven to be very popular and are really a tremendous driver of addiction.

These products contain really high percentages of nicotine per unit, and of course these companies are not interested in the casual user. They are looking to make people a consumer for life basically. So the new trend in the sale of these products is very concerning to us, and we've seen sales such that these manufacturers have had difficulty in some cases in keeping products on the shelves and have had to beef up their production capacity. So this is very concerning for us.

M. Glanville: The nicotine pouches that are, you kind of see them, they're widely available in your convenience stores and in some of your locations that we're familiar with don't contain leaf tobacco. Some of them are combined with a nicotine salt or come in a pouch that may look white and are placed into the mouth in the same way that sort of a pouch of snuff or Skoal that comes in a pouch would be used orally, and then they're quickly absorbed into the bloodstream.

S. Carson: What actions are being done or considered at the state and federal levels to regulate newer tobacco and vape products?

M. Glanville: Yeah, so really the gold standard for regulation and taxation of tobacco products is the cigarette tax in every state, right? And so what we would love to see is for all of these products to be included in the definition of a tobacco product and to be taxed at parity with cigarettes. So there's no need to reinvent the wheel in terms of building a new regulatory structure for any of these products or a new tax structure. We want to see them taxed at parity so that there is no competitive advantage created for any distinct product in the tax code. And we know there's significant data out there proving that tobacco taxes are the most effective way to drive down rates of use for tobacco products. So we want to see the same rate applied to these products and hopefully see the same sort of progress in driving down rates of use in addressing the cost of these new products that are coming onto the market.

J. Tyree: How is that strategy playing out in Oklahoma?

M. Glanville: We still in Oklahoma have significant progress to make in this area. In Oklahoma, e-cigarettes, for instance, are not defined as a tobacco product. They're not included under the tobacco tax. The same is true for these nicotine pouch products as well. So what we would want to see is another look, a fresh look at our tobacco tax policy that pulls in all of these products in a comprehensive fashion and makes sure that no product is getting an advantage in any way that the levers of the state are not being pulled in favor of any particular company, so we can just address the health aspects of these products.

J. Tyree: Realizing these products are not cigarettes, which everyone knows are deadly, what does the Cancer Action Network — and you personally — want parents and youths and really everyone to know about using newer tobacco and vape products?

M. Glanville: Yeah, it's a great question, and what we see is every time one of these new products come out on the market, it is routinely accompanied by this claim that this is a safer alternative, and whatever the mechanism may be, you'll see these companies claim that this removes the tar or this filters out chemicals X, Y and Z, and it seems like they're always just playing a game of chase with regulators and states and just trying to stay one step ahead of the police essentially, and allow themselves the space and the time to operate in a sort of gray area before everybody catches up to the fact that these are all just tobacco products and none of them are healthy, none of them can be considered a safer alternative.

So that's what I think that parents and young people should be aware of, is that nicotine is extremely addictive. It's very, very difficult to quit any of these products. And the bottom line is that they're all dangerous, they're all unsafe, and that is the business model; to addict you and to keep you using it. So you just cannot buy what these companies are selling you.

S. Carson: That's true. Thanks for joining us today, Matt. I appreciate your time and insights.

***** MUSIC *****

S. Carson: The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network does a lot to raise awareness about tobacco-related trends and policies — such as tax parity for all tobacco products — with the ultimate goal of reducing cancer and cancer-related deaths. You can learn a lot more of their efforts by visiting their website at fightcancer.org.

J. Tyree: Matt raised our awareness today of new tobacco-derived products like nicotine pouches and heated cigarettes. But there's also vaping, which exploded onto the scene a few years ago and attracts people of all ages, but especially youths and young adults. The latest data shows 21.7 percent of high school students in Oklahoma vape, and e-cigarette use among young adults ages 18 to 24 is slightly higher at 22.5 percent. In comparison, the latest national vaping averages for adults are 10.3 percent among those ages 18 to 20, and 15.5 percent of 21- to 24-year-olds.

S. Carson: Those are important facts and figures on vaping among younger people in Oklahoma and the U.S., but what do they really mean? What products do they vape, how often and why?

J. Tyree: Our next guest is embarking on an extensive study on the vaping trends and behaviors of young adults at the TSET Health Promotion Research Center. Let's meet her and learn more.

- Emily Hebert My name is Emily Hebert. I'm an assistant professor at the Health Promotion Research Center at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. And I have an appointment as well in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine.
- J. Tyree: What do you hope or expect to learn about teen vaping by the conclusion of this study?
- E. Hebert: Yeah. So our goal with this study is to understand how e-cigarette product characteristics, things like flavors or nicotine concentration and device type, actually impact real-world patterns of use and risk for addiction among teens and young adults. So we're especially interested in whether or not certain products lead to more frequent use or switching between products or poly-tobacco use, or signs of nicotine dependence, which are all key indicators of what the FDA calls abuse liability, so that means how likely is this product to create or sustain addiction. So although our participants are young adults, a lot of them started vaping as teens, and this study will help us trace how behaviors that start in adolescence evolve over time and which product features might contribute to that progression. I do want to mention that this study is part of a broader effort by the NIH and FDA to use tobacco regulatory science to inform policy. So the FDA requires companies to submit detailed data to get their products legally authorized, and there's a gap in real-world behavioral data, and so that's where our research comes in.
- J. Tyree: I'm sure there's been plenty of research conducted on vaping among youths and young adults. What sets this endeavor apart from the others?
- E. Hebert: So most studies that look at behavioral research related to vaping rely on people recalling what they used over the past 30 days. So we have a lot of really excellent nationally representative large surveys that track these behaviors, but a lot of the questions are asking, "Think of the favorite e-cigarette you used over the last month. Tell me about that." But what I've found in my pilot work is that young adults don't just stick to one product. They switch flavors, devices and nicotine levels all the time. And, in fact, a large percentage of users changed at least one product characteristic within a month, and that kind of variation is going to get missed in a traditional survey. So what we're doing in this study is we're using something called Ecological Momentary Assessment. So it's basically brief smartphone-based check-ins twice a day that's going to capture what products someone is using and how they're feeling in the moment. We're also letting participants submit pictures of their product and packaging, which is really going to help us independently verify things like flavor or device type or nicotine strength, especially because a lot of the packaging can be confusing or intentionally vague. So that level of detail is going to give us a much clearer and accurate picture of what's really being used and how it affects their behavior.

- J. Tyree: So you will gather a ton of same-day information from participants, rather than having them rely on memory.
- E. Hebert: Exactly. Exactly. That's what we're hoping for because accuracy is especially important in tobacco regulatory science. The FDA wants to be able to know does this specific flavor or product characteristic actually lead to increased public health risk?
- J. Tyree: This is a five-year, \$3.1 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. What's the general timeline of events over that time period, and what major things will the funding cover?
- E. Hebert: Yeah, great question. So as you said, this is a five-year study that's funded through a joint NIH-FDA initiative for tobacco regulatory science. We're going to be launching our first wave of data collection this fall, and then the study will run through fall 2028. So we're going to follow 350 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who vape, and we're going to check in with them every six months. And at each wave, they're going to complete a traditional survey. They'll complete 30 days of the smartphone-based EMA, and then they'll also complete a saliva test to confirm nicotine exposure.
- So the funding is really supporting participant compensation technology development for the app that we're using and then staff to help us manage and analyze all of that data. So all of this is designed to provide the FDA with real world evidence that's going to shape regulation around flavors and nicotine concentration and device type.
- There's going to be quite a bit of data to analyze, because we're going to have hundreds of data points per participant because we'll have two times a day for 30 days, and then for six waves of that.
- And we'll be able to answer some really cool questions because it won't just be, or certain flavors associated with heavier use patterns. It's also going to be stuff like do young adults vape in certain circumstances more than others? So are they doing it to relieve stress? Are they doing it when they're around friends, or are there other reasons that we don't quite understand yet? So all of that is going to take quite some time to dig through and analyze, but it's going to be really robust data. We're really excited.
- J. Tyree: Given the scope of this study and the new information that will be gleaned from it, I think a lot of people will share in this excitement. Backing up a bit, what got you interested in this field of study in the first place, and what continues to drive your interest?
- E. Hebert: Yeah. So this work is pretty personal to me. I got into public health because I was really interested in making the biggest impact on people's health behaviors, and I've lost a lot of family members to smoking-related illnesses, like I think most people have. So I've always been drawn to cancer prevention and tobacco control.
- With this research, I'm also just a huge tech nerd. So I've always been interested in how smartphones and apps and social media can modernize public health because a lot of the times we're dragging behind, for example, tobacco advertisers that are using all

these strategies. So I'm really interested in either reaching people with better interventions or collecting more accurate data. I just really love working at this intersection of tech and behavior to try and help improve people's health.

J. Tyree: Knowing what you know, Dr. Hebert, what would you say about vaping to an individual or small group of the following: teens, parents or teachers, and a mixed group of teens and adults?

E. Hebert: Yeah, that's a great question. To teens, I would say I totally get why people try vaping. It's everywhere. And a lot of the teens and young adults I've talked to use it to help with stress or anxiety, or sometimes they use it to focus while studying.

But what I would say is that nicotine actually makes anxiety worse over time, and it can really mess with your ability to concentrate. So there's no safe amount of vaping for teens. It's never a good idea to regularly breathe in something that isn't air. And these products are designed to hook you, so it can be really hard to stop once you start.

To parents or teachers, I would say stay curious and avoid judgment. A lot of teens vape for reasons that are emotional or situational. They're not just trying to rebel. So I think asking open-ended questions and showing that you're willing to listen can really open the door to good conversations.

And to a mixed group, I would say this research isn't just about who vapes. It's about how they vape, what they use and how those patterns affect health and dependence. So our research is designed to help public health professionals and policymakers understand what's really happening so we can design better prevention and smarter regulation.

J. Tyree: The research sounds fascinating and I look forward to what you and your colleagues discover with the unique approach. Is there anything else you would like to mention?

E. Hebert: I would just encourage folks to participate in research studies when they're able. We have a lot of really great research going on at the Health Promotion Research Center, not just for like vaping prevention, but we also have a lot of cancer prevention, smoking cessation studies that also use similar technology and smartphone-based studies, so it can help improve your health.

And the great part of these studies is that you're really contributing to something bigger. You're helping inform regulation and policy and interventions and things that can help other people. So why not? Especially for young adults where you're with your smartphone all the time, anyway, why not earn something, contribute to public health, and have fun doing it?

We have a lot of information on our TSET Health Promotion Research Center website. So there are links on there that talk about the kind of research that we do and also has links to a lot of our faculty members' websites that advertise studies that are going on. And people can always just reach out to our main phone number or email address if they have questions.

J. Tyree: That is good to know and the research center's website is <https://healthpromotionresearch.org>. Dr. Emily Hebert, thank you for joining us today.

E. Hebert: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here.

***** MUSIC *****

J. Tyree: The scope and depth of Dr. Hebert's study on vaping among young adults should be deep and impressive. We'll just have to wait a few years for the results. But her advice on vaping for youths and those who care about them provides food for thought that we can consider and use right now.

S. Carson: Our next guest will touch on how youth, parents and educators can talk about tobacco and vape products – after he shares big news with us regarding the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline. Chase Harvick is a TSET brand manager who has been on the podcast before, and he recently spoke with James about the Helpline and other resources to help folks of all ages quit tobacco products.

James: Chase, welcome back to the TSET Better Health Podcast. And we're here to talk about something that's very familiar to you. Because as you know, for more than 20 years, the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline has offered free coaching, online resources, and of course the two-week supply of nicotine replacement gum, patches or lozenges. So what has changed this summer?

Chase: James, we are just so pleased to share that the Helpline is doubling its base nicotine replacement therapy offerings from two to four weeks. Now, those are the gum, patches, or lozenges you mentioned earlier. And barring any medical issue, every person over 18 that registers with the Helpline is eligible for four weeks. And that's starting on July 1st. So yeah, we're live.

James: Oh, that's great.

Chase: They also get five coach calls and can use live online group sessions for additional support. Now, some registrants will qualify for more support if they have certain insurance plans or meet other criteria. We know that folks who use NRT, as we like to call nicotine replacement therapy to quit tobacco, they're twice as likely to succeed compared to those who go it alone. And we also know that more nicotine replacement therapy leads to even better chances of success. So when you pair that with coach support, our registrants really have an excellent shot at quitting for good.

James: In this podcast episode, we have talked about e-cigarettes and new tobacco products that are often marketed to teens and young people. Who can access Helpline services and do they mainly help Oklahomans quit cigarettes?

Chase: I'm glad you asked. While cigarettes are still the top tobacco product that registrants want to quit at 78%, we're seeing big year-over-year increase in vape-only users who call the helpline for support. Last year in FY24, 13 and a half of registrants were exclusively vape users, and that was up from 9% in FY23. It's worth noting, when we started asking this question in FY20, that number was 1.8%. So it's grown a lot.

Also interestingly, nearly one in four registrants reported using more than one tobacco product. So these are dual users or tri users who will use vapes in certain instances where they can't smoke, or they will switch between the two, which is not something that we want to see.

And honestly, these new and emerging products are just terrible.

There are vapes on the market now, James, with embedded technology. They give the user points every time they use the device. They maintain an online leaderboard and just encouraging people to use more and more. Others have games embedded in the device itself where vaping is rewarded with digital coins used to feed a digital pet to keep it alive, kind of like an old-fashioned Tamagotchi. But these products also vibrate and will display fireworks when the user is vaping to enhance the experience.

So we have gaming, technology, flavors and nicotine. These are all addictive, and they're piled on top of each other in a product that's relatively inexpensive, 18 to 24, and it's marketed to teens. It makes my blood boil. But back to the question at hand, to be eligible for the Helpline, participants must be at least 13 years old. It's important to note that nicotine replacement therapy, the gum, the lozenges, etc, are only available to individuals 18 or older. So we've partnered with My Life My Quit to offer quit support specifically for teens 13 to 17. Visit MyLifeMyQuit.com or text StartMyQuit to 3607 to learn more about that.

James: TSET launched its Talk About Tobacco campaign a few months ago to help parents and educators discuss tobacco and vape use with teens. How is that going so far?

Chase: Talk About Tobacco is seeing incredible utilization from parents, educators, and teens. While we only have one quarter of data back, during that one quarter, Tobacco Stops with Me had more than 14 million educational engagements, and that's up 186% from the same quarter last year. And anecdotally, I've heard from everyone I've talked to that our interactive digital experiences at Talk About Tobacco have been fan favorites. So check those out.

James: Where?

Chase: At TalkAboutTobacco.com. It is an interactive way that parents and teens or educators and teens can see it in reality. There are playing cards that will show you the impact of vaping on the human body. Or they have... Do you remember the old game Operation? It's kind of similar to that. You have a human body, and it will show you how vaping or tobacco use impacts every part, every system. Our skin, our lungs, just every part of the body is impacted by tobacco use. So you just moved your mouse over, but it's fantastic.

James: Where can Oklahomans both young and older access these free services to help them quit tobacco?

Chase: James, I would encourage folks to go to OKHelpline.com, or call 1-800-QUIT NOW to access those new benefits, the new four weeks of free NRT for everyone.

James: Okay, very good. Thank you very much for your time.

Chase: It is always a pleasure.

***** MUSIC *****

S. Carson: The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline and Talk About Tobacco campaign benefit Oklahomans by helping them quit or, even better, never start. It's a challenging but worthwhile endeavor, considering the new products and deceptive marketing the tobacco industry continue to release to keep people addicted to nicotine.

J. Tyree: We invite you to learn more of these TSET resources and about the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network' advocacy work and the TSET Health Promotion Research Center at the OU Health Sciences Center campus at their respective websites. You can find them at this episode's summary.

S. Carson: Speaking of websites, you can listen to this or any episode of the TSET Better Health Podcast at oklahoma.gov/tset/podcast or anywhere you listen to podcasts. Thank you for joining us today, and until next time, this is Sarah Carson ...

J. Tyree: And James Tyree wishing you peace,

S. Carson: And better health!