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May 18 Forum Aimed at Dangers of E-Cigarette Use by Youth

A free community forum on May 18 will educate parents and other adults about the health dangers that e-cigarettes and flavored tobacco pose for youth.

The event will be at 7 p.m. at the Capital High School Auditorium, 100 Valley Drive. According to organizers, the event is aimed at adults and is not suitable for youth to attend.

E-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among Helena-area youth. About 44 percent of high school students in Lewis and Clark County have tried them, according to the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey given by the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI). About 27 percent use them regularly.

By comparison, about 12 percent of area high school students smoke cigarettes.

Speakers at the forum will be:

- Kris Minard, tobacco-use prevention education specialist with OPI;
- Sarah Shapiro, tobacco prevention health educator at Lewis and Clark Public Health;
- Dr. Robert M. Shepard, a Helena-area physician; and
- Nicole Aune, manager of the Tobacco Use Prevention Program at the state health department.

Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is highly addictive.

“Nicotine in any form is unsafe for youth because it can harm their developing brains,” said Shapiro. “Plus, e-cigarettes contain lithium batteries, some of which have been known to explode. These explosions have caused fires and severe injuries.”

While e-cigarettes have been touted as an alternative to conventional tobacco use, research has found that youth who use e-cigarettes are more likely to begin using other tobacco products, like cigarettes.

“E-cigarettes are marketed using the same tactics once used to get kids to start smoking regular cigarettes,” Shapiro said. “These include candy-style packaging, sweet flavors, prominent placement in convenience stores, and slick advertisements.”

E-cigarettes have been produced in thousands of flavors targeted at youth, like cotton candy, root beer float, and bubblegum. Studies show that 70 percent of children visit convenience stores weekly, and 9 out of 10 smokers begin before they turn age 18.
More information about the forum, or about e-cigarettes in general, is available from Shapiro at 457-8924.