

Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

Portland School District Takes Action In Strengthening Tobacco Prevention Efforts

Summary

In an effort to combat the increased youth use of electronic cigarettes, the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program continues to work with the Portland School District in aiding them through education and policy change.

Public Health Challenge

Youth vaping and e-cigarette use continues to grow among Maine students. According to the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 45% of Maine youth have "ever used" e-cigarettes and 29% "currently use" e-cigarettes; both of these numbers have increased over the past two years. These products are not as harmless as once previously thought. E-cigarettes contain nicotine, an extremely addictive chemical that, according to the CDC, "can harm adolescent brain development" impacting: mood, learning and impulse control. Tobacco companies advertise their products as a better alternative to traditional cigarettes but long term health effects continue to be studied by professionals and remain largely unknown.



Approach

In an effort to prevent youth use of tobacco and vaping products, Portland Public Health finds it important to educate youth in engaging, active and evidence-based ways. Presentations focus on understanding tobacco products, how addiction affects the developing brain, and empowering youth to make healthy decisions for themselves. Portland Public Health also helped facilitate Sidekicks workshops in Portland schools. Sidekicks teaches youth skills that aid them in having peer-to-peer conversations about tobacco use. The 2019 MIYHS data reflects that youth in Cumberland county have a growing understanding that vape products contain nicotine as opposed to just flavoring. Youth stating they are vaping nicotine went up from 25% to 56% from 2017 to 2019, and youth stating that it is just flavoring lowered from 54% to 23%. Through these relationships and ongoing conversations, we are able to discuss even deeper rooted and sustainable tobacco prevention efforts alongside educational efforts.



"We have adopted some significant shifts in how we respond to possession and use student violations of the policy to adopt a more restorative and intervention based approach." Aaron Townsend, Assistant Superintendent of School Management of Portland Public Schools.

Results

Portland Public Health's presence in the schools led to discussions around updating policy language and moving towards restorative practices. By working closely with Deering High School's administrators and social worker Bob Carrol, a policy draft was shared with the superintendent. Through the assistant superintendent, Aaron Townsend, the ADC Tobacco policy was updated and approved in November 2020. A partnership form with Portland Public Health was also signed by the assistant superintendent to continue educational and policy efforts within the district.

Sustaining Success

Through active collaborations and relationships at schools within the Portland School District, Portland Public Health continues to assist Portland Public Schools with their tobacco prevention efforts, for all students, faculty, and the community at large. After updating to a more comprehensive tobacco and smoke free policy, Portland Public Health is planning on assisting Portland Public Schools in their enforcement and communication efforts.

For More Information Contact Us At:

City of Portland
Public Health Division
kfaucher@portlandmaine.gov

