

# ‘My Life, My Quit’ helps MetroWest teenagers kick the vaping habit

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By Henry Schwan  
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Massachusetts is one of nine states participating in a program to help teenagers stop using electronic cigarettes. Some call vaping a health “epidemic” that must be stopped.

Statistics show the phenomenon known as “vaping” is a health problem for teenagers in MetroWest, and a new multi-state program hopes to give them the tools to quit.

Called “My Life, My Quit,” teenagers can text or call a toll-free number, 1-855-891-9989, to get connected with a coach for five sessions of personalized support. Those sessions can be done through live texting, phone or online chat. The goal is to build a plan to quit tobacco and vaping - the term used to describe puffing on electronic cigarettes.

It was launched at the start of the month by National Jewish Health, a hospital in Denver. Massachusetts is the only New England state in the program. Other states include Colorado, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Utah.

My Life, My Quit builds on National Jewish Health’s existing program that helps adults quit smoking through a toll-free number: 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

Besides a toll free number, [My Life, My Quit offers a website – mylifemyquit.com](http://mylifemyquit.com) – so that teens can live chat with a coach, get information about vaping and tobacco, and access activities to support quitting and stress relief.

“We know that vaping is a problem out there,” said Thomas Ylioja, Ph.D, clinical director of Health Initiatives at National Jewish Health.

Vaping is associated with alarming statistics, according to Ylioja. Twice as many teens smoke e-cigarettes, compared to traditional smokes. Also, teenagers are four times more likely to smoke cigarettes if they start using electronic ones.

Some Framingham High School students were suspended this past school year after they were caught vaping on school grounds, according to Paul Spear, the school’s athletic director.

The number of high school students who used electronic vapor products jumped from 28% in 2016 to 41% in 2018, according to the 2018 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey. Those who used in the past 30 days jumped from 15% to 28% during the same period.

The hikes represent the largest increase in any category tracked in the survey’s history, according to Rebecca Donham, senior program officer with the MetroWest Health Foundation, a Framingham-based independent health philanthropy that has administered the survey since 2006. At the middle school level, the survey showed 10% tried vaping in 2018, compared to 6% in 2016. For those who used in the past 30 days, the percentages over the two-year period increased from 2% to 6%.

Recommendations from the foundation to combat vaping locally are expected by summer’s end. Since January, it has brought together pediatricians, public health officials and school nurses to look at prevention, early intervention and treatment for nicotine addiction.

The dangers of vaping, according to Ylioja, include harmful health effects from nicotine and chemicals released by the heating up of liquids in vape cartridges.

Those chemicals can become carcinogenic and harm tissues in the lungs, Ylioja said. Personal coaches through My Life, My Quit are trained in cognitive and psycho-social development, according to Ylioja. They help youngsters develop refusal skills, so they can say no to peers in social situations that involve vapes and cigarettes.

Nearly 40% of adults who use the National Jewish Health adult quit line stop smoking within six months after enrollment, Ylioja said.

That program is a combination of counseling and medications. Prescription medications are available through an online pharmacy and require a prescription from a primary care doctor. Over-the-counter medications, like gums, patches and lozenges, are also available.

My Life, My Quit doesn't offer medications, and teens using the program are referred back to their primary care provider if they request them.

While the adult quit line has hard numbers to measure results, Ylioja said the youth line will be evaluated over time.

Ylioja knows how hard it is to stop smoking.

He started smoking cigarettes when he was 11 years old, because he was surrounded by family members in rural Saskatchewan who smoked.

It took him years to quit with the help of counseling and medications, and finally kicked the habit when he was in his early 20s.

Ylioja acknowledged triggers, like the smell of secondhand smoke, can send some back into using cigarettes and electronic cigarettes.

He hopes My Life, My Quit gives teenagers the tools they need to avoid those triggers.

"I want to help others stop smoking," Ylioja said.

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