

1 in 8 Minnesota teens smoke e-cigarettes

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While a new survey shows tobacco use by Minnesota high school students has declined in recent years, state health officials are concerned about the rising number of young people using electronic cigarettes.

One in eight high school students -- and 3 percent of middle school students -- had tried an e-cigarette in the last month, according to the state's latest survey on youth tobacco use released Monday.

Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Ed Ehlinger said there were some encouraging aspects of the survey, such as the unprecedented drop in cigarette smoking among high school students -- from 18 percent in 2011 to less than 11 percent this year.

But the results of its first survey to gauge e-cigarette use were troubling, reminding Ehlinger of the rise in teen smoking decades ago. Ehlinger said the electronic devices, which vaporize a nicotine solution, can harm brain development and trigger lifelong addiction.

"I have a real sense of deja vu about e-cigarettes," Ehlinger said.

Nearly 13 percent of high school students surveyed said they had used e-cigarettes in the last month. A quarter of high school students who have tried e-cigarettes have never smoked a cigarette or used other tobacco products.

Kendra Roedl, a junior at Minneapolis South High School, said e-cigarettes appeal to some of her classmates because they don't leave behind the telltale aroma that tips off parents. And the fruity flavors "makes them less real" than cigarettes, she said.

To halt e-cigarette use among teens, Ehlinger said the state should consider banning sale of those flavors and expanding an indoor smoking ban to e-cigarettes. A number of Minnesota cities have already enacted local bans.