

# OUTSMART SMART VAPES

## IOWA STUDENTS FOR TOBACCO EDUCATION & PREVENTION

### Get involved

Smart vapes look techy and act like games, but they're designed to hook you. Break the streak and speak up to friends, peers and supportive adults in your local communities about the harmful truth of smart vapes.

### What are Smart Vapes?

Smart vapes are Bluetooth-enabled e-cigarettes that connect to a smartphone app. These apps include features like streaks, goals, and social elements—just like popular video games and social media. They're designed to hook young users and encourage frequent use through game-like rewards and peer interaction.

### Why It's a Problem

Smart vapes are specifically targeted at youth, using technology and game design to make nicotine use feel fun and harmless. The design of smart vapes rewards addiction. Rather than discouraging use, it may normalize or glamorize it. Smart vapes hide health risks by wrapping the experience in a layer of "play" but the reality is dangerous! Youth are particularly vulnerable to habit-forming behavior, especially when reinforced by gamified systems. Nicotine harms brain development in young people, leading to impulse control issues, memory problems and difficulty concentrating. Teens who vape are at a much higher risk for future addiction.

### Smart vapes have game-like features.

- Tracks use (like a step counter): number of puffs, usage streaks.
- Achievements or rewards: for continued use or trying new flavors.
- Progress notifications: dashboards, sounds cues or flashing lights that change color with usage.
- Customization: changing skins, lights or flavor modes, which feels similar to customizing avatars or gear in video games.



### **Game-like features increase engagement.**

- Frequent rewards (flashing lights, congratulatory messages, sound cues) create a dopamine loop similar to video games or social media.
- Some devices allow social sharing, creating comparisons or leaderboards to add a competitive element.
- Streaks and goals encourage daily usage, just like Snapchat streaks or step goals on a fitness tracker.

### **Smart vapes are made to appeal to youth.**

- Smart vapes can seem more like gadgets or lifestyle accessories than harmful nicotine delivery systems.
- They appeal to tech-savvy youth, used to gaming and social media, making the habit feel fun, rewarding and socially integrated not realizing it's an addiction.

## **Directions**

### **Break the streak and speak up!**

**Educate Adults.** Present to school board members to help them understand how smart vapes work and why they're harmful to young people. Educated adults can better support prevention efforts and policy changes in schools. The presentation and fact sheet for adults can be found at: [hhs.iowa.gov/istep](https://hhs.iowa.gov/istep)

**Engage Peers.** Set up an interactive educational table for friends and peers to learn the truth about smart vapes. The Council recommends doing this in the school cafeteria or during a home sports game.

### **How to play**

- One person at a time drops a chip into the top of the Plinko board.
- Watch the chip land in one of the slots at the bottom to determine the quiz question.
- Once the person answers the question, they can pick out a prize.
- Offer them a fact sheet.

## **Materials**

Plinko board, quiz questions, fact sheet for teens, fact sheet for adults, presentation slides with talking points and prizes.



**@IowaSTEP**  
[hhs.iowa.gov/istep](https://hhs.iowa.gov/istep)



**Health and Human Services**