

TEENS WANT HELP NOT PUNISHMENT FOR VAPING

COLIN JAMES

TEENAGERS want more education and health warnings to stop young people from vaping, with many unaware of its harmful effects, a survey has found.

Commissioner for Children and Young People Helen Connolly asked 950 South Australian teenagers whether they vaped, with two in three saying they had tried it at least once.

The Advertiser reported that the survey, released last week, revealed schools were taking punitive actions including removing toilet doors, - expelling students caught vaping or selling e-cigarettes and conducting random searches.

Many students felt “misunderstood, blamed, shamed and punished” for vaping.

It can also be revealed that, as a result of their confusion over the issue, the 13 to 19-year-olds told Ms Connolly there was not enough education by schools and adults about the dangers of vaping.

Specifically, teenagers said they wanted schools to teach them about:

SHORT and long-term physical health effects;

VAPING'S addictive nature;

HOW easy it is to buy vapes;

WHETHER it is illegal;

HOW cheap it is to initially get a vape but how expensive it can be if it becomes a habit;

HOW vapes are made and what's in them;

HOW vaping compares with smoking cigarettes or other drugs; and,

WHAT to do if you want to quit or feel like you are becoming addicted.

Ms Connolly said teens also had called for more advertisements and health warnings, “like with smoking, particularly as the current focus on

cigarettes makes it seem as though vaping isn't 'bad' in comparison".

It is illegal to sell vapes to minors in South Australia. But she said many teenagers did not know that.

"Many young people are aware that vaping is 'not good' and they want adults to do more to prevent it, especially among younger kids," her report said. "Others know vaping is meant to be illegal but that this doesn't appear to be the case in reality (as they are so readily available for sale)."

Ms Connolly said students viewed vaping as "more common, acceptable and normalised than smoking cigarettes".

"They highlighted how easy it is to obtain vapes, how popular it is and how good vaping tastes as 'a sweet version of a cigarette'," she said.

Ms Connolly said the most common reason given by teens for vaping was "it helps them to relieve stress, calm anxiety and depression and to concentrate, escape or relax".

"They wanted adults to understand that they do not vape just to 'be cool or rebellious' but 'because it provides temporary relief from reality', 'distracts us from pain' and 'is very useful for anxiety as the nicotine calms you'," she said.

Ms Connolly said young people believed education "should not only help them to understand the risks and harms ... but also equip them with practical resources and support to stop vaping with an emphasis on understanding the benefits of not vaping".

SA Education Minister Blair Boyer discussed the survey with his state and federal counterparts at a meeting in Canberra last Wednesday, in a bid to form a national stance.