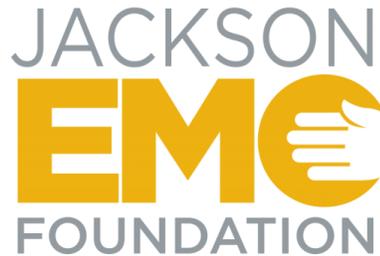


The Georgia Healthy Family Alliance and the work of the Northeast Georgia Tar Wars Strike Force were recently highlighted in the Jackson EMC Foundation's 2021 Annual Report an excerpt of which is below:

[Teaching the Smoking and](#)



[Dangers of Vaping](#)

Just when America thought it was on the verge of kicking the smoking habit in its younger population, the trend turned the other direction in 2016 when vaping and e-cigarette smoking gained traction with teens. The Georgia Healthy Family Alliance works to reverse the trend.

Of 52 people who died in the United States due to vaping-related illness in 2019, six were in Georgia. Alarmed, Governor Brian Kemp issued a public health advisory notifying Georgians of the potential hazards of adolescent vaping.

Today, an epidemic of teen smoking remains, according to Dr. Monica Newton, chair of the Northeast Georgia Strike Force. "The need for vaping and tobacco use prevention could not be more urgent," she says. To address the need, the Jackson EMC Foundation provided funding to the Northeast Georgia Strike Force for its Tar Wars campaign, a national vaping and tobacco use prevention program overseen in Georgia by the Tucker based Georgia Healthy Family Alliance, the foundation arm of the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians. The initiative began in 1988 to combat smoking and chewing tobacco and evolved as tobacco products changed.

A two-decade decline in teen smoking resulted in an all-time low of only 8% of American teens reporting regular tobacco use in 2015, according to the Georgia Healthy Family Alliance. But before prevention advocates could catch their breath, the smoking trends reversed as e-cigarettes and vapes gained popularity. In 2019, one in four high school students and one in 12 middle schoolers reported they had vaped, according to the Alliance.

"Juul was the first vape to become mainstream among teens, and usage exploded among high school students from 2016 to 2018," says Kara Sinkule, deputy director at Georgia Healthy Family Alliance. "With flavors from mint to mango, Juul became the product of choice among teens, but now it's yesterday's news as Velo and other brands have gained popularity."

For fourth and fifth graders in Barrow and Hall counties, the Tar Wars program focuses on the dangers of tobacco use, e-cigarettes, vapes and hookahs. “Our goal is to shape children’s opinions about vaping before they start – to teach them about the dangers before they are offered their first cigarette, vape or dip,” says Sinkule. The Tar Wars program was presented to 2,731 students last spring with many creating artwork for a statewide poster contest. By breathing through drinking straws while holding their nose and jogging in place for 15 seconds, they experienced what it feels like to have diminished lung capacity, an all-too-often effect of smoking and vaping.

As Georgia Healthy Family Alliance continues to seek creative ways to keep kids away from tobacco and vapes, Sinkule considers the words of Dr. Wayne Hoffman, a Georgia family physician who recently said, “Cigarettes are the devil we know. Vapes are the devil we just met.”

“Both are bad,” says Sinkule. “We just don’t know the full extent of how dangerous vaping is. We do know that cigarettes, over decades, do great damage to your body. With vaping, the damage occurs more quickly.”



Yargo Elementary School student Noah won third place in a statewide competition where fourth and fifth graders created advertisements for living a tobacco and nicotine-free life.



Yargo Elementary School fifth grade teacher Elizabeth Perry shares with students the damage caused by cigarettes, chewing tobacco and vapes during a recent Tar Wars presentation.