

An exciting new Virtual Reality offering

ConverSage proudly introduces an evidence-based, behavior-changing anti-vaping VR game developed by researchers at Yale University School of Medicine. The game delivers the scientific facts about how vaping negatively affects adolescents' health and gives them the skills to make healthy decisions. This comprehensive curriculum, including evaluation tools, can be incorporated into an existing substance abuse program, or delivered as a standalone health unit. The goals for the program are twofold:

- 1) Reduce the likelihood that adolescents and young teens will (a) adopt vaping and/or (b) continue to vape and potentially ingest more harmful, potentially addictive, substances such as THC; and
- 2) Empower adolescents, young teens, and their caring adults to confidently initiate “difficult conversations” with their at-risk peers and children, respectively, to educate and discourage them from vaping.



Statement of Need

Substance use and health & wellness educators require additional, innovative options to address vaping among adolescent and teen populations. Two concerning trends are:

- 1) Increasing instances of teens vaping with THC additives, and
- 2) Increasing experimentation and vaping among middle school populations.

Despite many successful efforts to slow the adoption rate of teen vaping, there is a prevalent belief among teens that vaping is a) “safe” and b) parents and caring adults see vaping as “more acceptable” than other substance use and therefore of less concern. The ability to change these beliefs in the limited amount of engagement time available, especially given curriculum demands and uncertainties associated with the pandemic, requires a scalable, technology-enabled approach.

Solution

ConverSage offers the VR game known as *Invite Only VR: Vaping Prevention Game*, in a SCORM compliant version co-developed and evaluated by Dr. Kimberly Hieftje, Director of the play4REAL XR Lab at Yale University School of Medicine. Dr. Hieftje is a Research Scientist at the school and the Deputy Director of the Yale Center for Health & Learning Games which focuses on the development and evaluation of videogame interventions for health prevention and promotion,

behavior change, and education in adolescents and young adults. ConverSage has exclusive licensing rights to this software and Dr. Hieftje serves as an Advisor to the ConverSage team.

This VR game is a proven, engaging, and immersive learning experience that will support schools' efforts to reach students sooner and dispel prevalent misinformation about vaping. The VR solution offers a fun and scalable solution that augments existing diversion and educational programs. It allows each participant to learn discreetly, at their own pace, and to practice navigating difficult and socially awkward conversations with their peers and caring adults. Examples of some of the topics discussed throughout the simulated exercise include:



- E-cigarette vapor isn't just water vapor, it has lots of chemicals in it that can cause cancer and lung disease.
- E-cigarettes almost always contain nicotine, the chemical responsible for addiction.
- Addiction to nicotine as a teen can rewire your brain to become more easily addicted to other drugs.
- Companies that sell e-cigarettes target teens specifically by selling candy and fruit flavors.
- Teens who vape are THREE times more likely to smoke cigarettes ONE year after they start.
- Vaping can cause coughing and wheezing and make asthma worse.
- Flavors used in e-cigarettes are made from chemicals can cause cancer and other diseases.
- The more teens see e-cigarettes ads, the more likely they will vape.



Positive Impact: *Invite Only VR is the only evidence-based vaping prevention application on the market that focuses solely on e-cigarettes. In the fall of 2019/Spring of 2020, the play4REAL XR Lab conducted a non-randomized cluster trial of 287 middle school students and the findings from this study were promising. From baseline to 6 months, participants who played Invite Only VR had greater improvements in knowledge, perceptions of harm, social perceptions about e-cigarette use, nicotine addiction knowledge, and nicotine perceptions of addiction compared to the control group. Participants also reported high enjoyment playing the intervention, with the majority of participants playing the game to completion. Dr. Hieftje noted "our findings suggest that Invite Only VR may be an effective approach to the prevention of e-cigarette use in teens."*

