

Amid nationwide e-cigarette ‘epidemic,’ Miami Beach cracks down on sales to teens

[Miami Beach](#)

[By Kyra Gurney](#)

October 17, 2018 12:25 PM, Updated October 17, 2018 09:42 PM

See the latest device that helps students sneak e-cigarettes into schools

The design of the this tiny e-cigarette doesn't turn heads when students carry it with all of their other school essentials. By Tammy Ljungblad
Up Next

Loaded: 41.44%
0:00

- captions off, selected

Current Time 0:00

/

Duration 1:33

See the latest device that helps students sneak e-cigarettes into schools

The design of the this tiny e-cigarette doesn't turn heads when students carry it with all of their other school essentials. By Tammy Ljungblad

Amid skyrocketing teen e-cigarette use nationwide, the city of Miami Beach on Wednesday passed new rules designed to keep the devices away from minors.

Although federal law prohibits the sale of e-cigarettes to anyone under 18, [teens in Miami Beach say](#) they have been able to order the devices online, get an unscrupulous adult to buy them, or find a smoke shop that doesn't ask for ID. They also use delivery apps that send someone else to buy the product, enabling the teens to avoid age restrictions, according to city officials.

The devices — which have a sleek design and nicotine cartridges in appealing flavors like mango and cucumber — have become so popular at Miami Beach Senior High that teens skip class to vape in the bathroom, use the devices at lunch, and even sneak puffs in class while the teacher's back is turned, according to students and parents.

Nationwide, the use of e-cigarettes among high school students has grown by 900 percent in recent years, [according to a 2016 report from the U.S. Surgeon General](#).

Unlimited Digital Access: Only \$0.99 For Your First Month

Get full access to Miami Herald content across all your devices.

[SAVE NOW](#)

On Wednesday, the City Commission voted unanimously to strengthen age verification requirements for businesses that sell e-cigarettes and to stiffen penalties for violators. The new rules require businesses — including online retailers, even if they're based in another city or state — to obtain proof that a customer is over 18 before mailing or delivering e-cigarettes to Miami Beach. Businesses would be required to get a copy of a customer's driver's license and verify the customer's information in a “commercially available database.”

The commission also voted to impose stricter penalties on businesses that violate the law. Selling e-cigarettes to a minor is currently a second-degree misdemeanor that is punishable by a fine of up to \$500 and up to 60 days in jail. Under the new rules, businesses that break the law could also have their business license suspended for up to six months and could lose it altogether for a second violation.



A collection of vape pens that have been confiscated from students at a school in Colorado. Miami Beach is cracking down on the sale of e-cigarettes to minors. NICK COTE NYT

E-cigarette use among teens “has become a healthcare problem in that children are really being marketed,” said Mayor Dan Gelber, who pushed for the new legislation. “These nicotine delivery systems are becoming profit centers for tobacco companies with the idea that [teens] will be doing that for the rest of their lives,” he added.

The Miami-Dade school district is also taking steps to curb e-cigarette use. This fall, the district [launched an awareness campaign](#) to educate students and parents about the dangers of e-cigarette use and train teachers and school administrators to spot e-cigarette use and vaping in schools. The district also plans to start a pilot program to install e-cigarette detection devices in several high schools.

Although e-cigarettes are marketed as a safer alternative to smoking tobacco, experts say there are still a lot of risks associated with inhaling liquid nicotine. Nicotine exposure can harm the developing adolescent brain, affect impulse control and cause attention, cognition and mood problems, according to a report from the U.S. Surgeon General. There is also strong evidence that e-cigarette use [increases the risk that a teen will start smoking conventional cigarettes](#).

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration [recently announced a crackdown](#) on youth e-cigarette use, which the administration referred to as an “epidemic.” In September, the FDA announced that it had issued more than 1,300 warning letters and fines to retailers who sold e-cigarettes to minors. The administration also gave five e-cigarette manufacturers 60 days to come up with a plan to keep their products away from teens. Otherwise, the FDA warned, some products could be taken off the market.

E-cigarette sales weren’t the only activity commissioners restricted on Wednesday. The City Commission also voted to [create “slow speed, minimum wake” zones](#) for motorboats and personal watercraft near nine bridges in an effort to curb saltwater corrosion. Engineers [blame motor-operated water vessels](#) speeding under the causeway and shooting saltwater into the air for accelerating corrosion under the MacArthur Causeway, which required extensive repairs this year that have caused traffic congestion. A final vote on the speed restrictions is scheduled for Dec. 12.

Commissioners also voted to reduce the number of Ocean Drive establishments [exempt from certain eastbound noise restrictions](#) as part of the city’s ongoing effort to make the iconic street quieter and more family-friendly.

Miami Herald staff writer Colleen Wright contributed to this report.