

ZYN SANITY

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ZYN IS REPLACING VAPING AS THE GO-TO SOURCE OF NICOTINE FOR TEENS. HERE'S HOW IT HAPPENED.

At a party last fall, Kylie tried ZYN for the first time. A boy she knew from school had a pack and offered her a tiny white pouch.

Kylie, who “wasn’t well informed on how to use it,” stuck the pouch behind her upper lip, unaware that it contained the highest nicotine dosage of any ZYN product. Overwhelmed by the effects of nicotine, Kylie threw up for 30 minutes.

“I didn’t feel anything for the first five minutes,” she said. “Then, all of a sudden, I felt really heavy and shaky.”

Kylie has not used a nicotine product since that night.

“It traumatized me so much because I genuinely don’t think I have ever felt that bad,” she said. “I was on the floor crying, asking people for help. I was totally out of it because of how bad it made me feel.”

HISTORICAL ZYNSIGHT

ZYN is a brand of nicotine pouches with flavors such as wintergreen and cinnamon that appeal to teenage consumers seeking an alternative to vaping. ZYN pouches resemble packs of silicate drying agents that come inside vitamin bottles.

Owned by multinational tobacco company Philip Morris since 2022, ZYN is marketed to tobacco users as a safer source of nicotine. Although the pouches do not contain tobacco, regulators still treat it as a tobacco product. Until the Food and Drug Administration can investigate the safety of ZYN, the product remains available for sale in the United States.

The FDA has issued 119 warning letters and filed 41 civil money penalty complaints against brick-and-mortar retailers that have sold flavored ZYN pouches between October 2023 and February 2024. The FDA has also warned three online retailers regarding the sale of unauthorized flavors

All student names have been changed to protect privacy. Sources referred to by only one name have requested to remain anonymous.

of ZYN pouches.

Brian King, Director of FDA’s Center for Tobacco Products, stated in an FDA article: “There is no excuse for selling tobacco products to any underage person, and FDA will hold retailers accountable for those violations – especially those who continue to do so after being warned.”

An applicant seeking to get their product approved by the FDA must demonstrate that it meets a list of necessary criteria, which includes proving that the product meets legal public health standards.

ZYN packets were first released in Scandinavia by Nicovum, a Swedish pharmaceutical company. The product entered American markets in 2014, followed by brands such as on! and Rogue. Yet ZYN only gained popularity last year. CNN reported that 350 million cans of ZYN were sold in 2023, an annual increase of 62% from the previous year.

ZYN pouches are designed to be placed between the user’s gum and upper lip. “Zynning” was marketed to be more discreet than smoking, so people could get a nicotine hit without drawing unwanted attention.

Amy Malin teaches a semester-long psychology course and has evaluated the social benefits of ZYN use.

“You don’t have to leave wherever you are to go and get your nicotine fix,” Malin said. “You can just do it wherever. Then there isn’t the stigma associated with smoking, and there also isn’t secondhand smoke.”

Recently, ZYN has gained massive popularity online, exploding on social media platforms like TikTok, with “Zynfluencers” accumulating almost 300 million views.

ZYN has also reached the athletic world. “If I scroll for a while, I’ll probably see an athlete with ZYN,” said Vince, a junior. “Just the other day, I saw Bills quarterback Josh Allen doing ZYN on Instagram before a game.”

Upper School counselor Jake Davis is familiar with the effects of ZYN through his conversations with students. He notes that ZYN is being advertised as a wellness product.

“For a long time, they have marketed to teens by trying to create flavors that seem enticing and fun,” Davis said.

“Now, it seems like it can be a version of self-care, which is very dangerous.” In 2024, a lawsuit was filed against ZYN, claiming that Philip Morris was marketing and selling their product without appropriate nicotine warnings.

In September, the City of San Francisco filed its own lawsuit targeting several online vendors accused of avoiding laws aimed at preventing kids from getting addicted to tobacco products.

ZYNDULGENT BEHAVIOR

Paul is a regular ZYN user who admits that the drug has become a part of his daily life. “I wouldn’t even say I do it recreationally,” Paul said. “It’s like waking up in the morning and taking ADHD medicine.”

Paul goes through one pack of ZYN – which holds 15 pouches – in three to four days. He credits ZYN for helping regulate his emotions.

“I feel lightheaded, but not in a dehydrated way,” he said. “My senses are slightly heightened, but my body feels really calm.”

Paul says that ZYN has its own unique benefits. “It’s the healthiest way to put nicotine in your body.”

Vince, a multi-sport athlete who has never done ZYN, has observed the phenomenon and considers it a replacement for other tobacco products.

“Sportswise, it’s kind of an accepted thing,” he said. “I’ve had coaches who said they stopped smoking and now do ZYN, so in that regard, it’s positive.”

Quin has friends who use ZYN at parties or before games to “calm their nerves.” He added that a video of people vaping looks worse than a clip of people Zynning.

Vince has observed the peer pressure – and stigma – associated with substance use.

“There are different degrees,” he explained. “If you can do more milligrams of ZYN, you’re considered tougher.”

Grayson often notices that his friends choose to use ZYN at parties over harder drugs in social settings. He credits this trend to the stigma surrounding vaping and how it is considered “unacceptable because people know how bad it is.”

Grayson has witnessed a group of boys pressuring a friend to use ZYN, calling it “a bit of a problem.” “It’s different when you’re not being pressured because then at least it’s your decision,” Grayson said. Grayson’s friend doesn’t drink or want to do drugs. “It’s not good that he is being put into a position in which he has to compromise his values.”

Most ZYN-stances occur at parties, yet some choose to use it in more casual settings. Isaac used ZYN for the first time while hanging out with friends.

“We didn’t have anything to do,” he said. “So we just walked to the park and did it.” When he tried it for the first time, he felt dizzy and exhausted. “It feels like you’re out of it,” Isaac said, “but it’s enjoyable – I would do it again.”

TRUTH OR CONZYNNQUENCES

The human body absorbs nicotine through mucous membranes within the inner lining of the mouth and directly into the bloodstream. The effects can last up to one hour.

Paula Angus, who teaches Neuroscience and Anatomy, explains, “It goes right through your skin. Here, it’s going to be delivered even faster because it’s a moist surface. It’s very thin, and it’s packed with blood vessels.”

Once in the bloodstream, nicotine stimulates the adrenal glands, resulting in the discharge of adrenaline, which causes an increase in blood pressure, respiration and heart rate.

“In terms of your health, it’s worse based on how fast it’s going to deliver and how much nicotine you’re going to be exposed to at any one time,” Angus added.

Short-term effects of ZYN usage include hiccups, gum irritation, upset stomach and sore throat. In the long term, nicotine use during adolescence can disrupt the formation of brain circuits that control attention, hinder learning abilities and increase susceptibility to addiction.

Malin explains that, as the brain develops, it makes connections between neurons using an ideal level of chemicals that the body naturally produces. Using drugs upsets the brain’s natural chemical balance and may disrupt levels of acetylcholine and dopamine.

“If you take it regularly, then when you’re not taking it, those withdrawal symptoms feel like you’re depressed and anxious,” Malin said. “You have difficulty concentrating and feel like you can’t focus.”

Angus further explains that, at any age, the brain is still changing due to its plasticity. For teenagers, nicotine hijacks neural pathways, influencing the development of other regions of the brain and leading to addiction.

Both the FDA and Environmental Protection Agency have designated nicotine as a noxious substance. “So in that ZYN packet there, there’s a little bit of hazardous waste,” Malin said.

Recently, ZYN’s surge in popularity has cut into vape sales. According to the Federal Trade Commission, the sale of all oral nicotine products more than doubled from 453 million in 2021 to 1 billion in 2022.

Tobacco companies benefit from having lifelong customers, so it’s in their interest that teens become addicted to using their products into adulthood.

**JAKE DAVIS
UPPER SCHOOL COUNSELOR**

“They certainly seem to be safer than tobacco cigarettes,” said Ashley Dowd, a postdoctoral research fellow at Johns Hopkins University who was quoted in a Time online article published in January. “But having a general sense that they’re safe would concern me, especially if it prompts people who don’t currently use nicotine to pick up a pouch thinking it’s harmless.”

The School Handbook states that the use or possession of tobacco or nicotine products on campus or any school-sponsored activities is a Level 2 disciplinary infraction, which includes one or more work halls, in-school isolation or disciplinary watch.

Dean of Students Bailey Duncan urges students to seek help if they are facing substance abuse.

“If a student is struggling with something substance-related, they can ask for help, almost like an amnesty clause, and we’ll get them help versus them getting in trouble,” Duncan said.

Davis notes that warning students about the harmful effects of ZYN is particularly important.

“This generation of teens is experiencing mental health challenges at a higher rate than most generations that came before them,” Davis said. “They’re especially vulnerable to products like these that have really never been more powerful and more dangerous. And tobacco companies benefit from having lifelong customers, so it’s in their interest that teens become addicted to using their products into adulthood.”

Malin urges teenagers to be more aware about the consequences of drug use.

“The way you think about a substance is going to influence your use of it,” Malin said. “I know we can be curious about things, or we feel like everybody else is doing it. Pause. Do a little research.”

Kylie encourages others to learn from her mistakes.

“It’s really, really important to do your research, or you could end up in a situation like I was,” she said. “You’re going to go to a party and a ton of kids are going to be using it because that’s the culture. And if you want to do it, that’s on you. But just know what you’re getting yourself into.”

ZYN BY THE NUMBERS

334 MILLION

**total growth in cans sold
by Zyn over 6 years**

Source: Public Health Law Center

\$16 BILLION

**aquisition price for ZYN by
Philip Morris in 2022**

Bloomberg

641%

**increase in ZYN
sales from 2019
to 2022**

American Lung Association

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morning and taking
ADHD medicine.**

**PAUL
SJS STUDENT**

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**AMY MALIN
PSYCHOLOGY TEACHER**