

Dear Educators,

February is national cancer prevention month. I have worked in the cancer field for many years and have often wondered what cancer prevention really looks like.

It is a fact that kids who do not pick up a cigarette before the age of 18 will likely never be smokers. And there is much confusion about vaping and marijuana. The rate of vaping among youths has tripled in the last five years. Many teens believe vaping is a safer alternative to cigarettes. It is not. And many teens do not realize that marijuana smoke contains the same tar element as tobacco smoke.

It is a fact that teens that get one sunburn before the age of 18 double their risk of melanoma. Melanoma is the second most common cancer in teens and young adults. Just one trip to a tanning bed increases your risk of melanoma by 74%. Yet we know that 1.6 million teens are using the tanning beds.

It is a fact that the HPV vaccine is 97% effective in preventing diseases caused by HPV. Yet according to the CDC only about 57% of girls and 35% of boys have been vaccinated.

These facts given to teens could change the trajectory of their lives. They have told us so.

So my question is, why aren't we talking to teens more? Why aren't we trying to prevent behaviors that we know can lead to cancer?

We are all rightly focused on treating cancer but I'd like to make the argument that prevention is a lot more cost effective and efficient. We need to commit to do both. And we need to be talking with kids even younger than high school to plant the seeds for good health.

It's apparent that changing behaviors could have an impact on cancer prevention. Educating our kids early and often may just be the small change we need to make a huge difference.

Let's invest in our kids; it could yield to significant economic and social returns. Let's give our kids the best possible chances for a healthy life.

Cancer Happens is a cancer education and risk reduction program offered, free of charge, to middle and high school classrooms nationwide. The goal of *Cancer Happens* is to educate and empower students to create a healthy lifestyle and feel more confident about talking to, and supporting, those with cancer. We can help you support your students. Contact us at info@cancerpathways.org or 206-709-1400 to find out more.

Sincerely,

Anna Gottlieb, MPA

Executive Director

Cancer Pathways

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