



The dangers of dab pens

The convenience of smoking indoors comes with a caveat

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Popular among college students thanks to their discreet nature, weed concentrate cartridges have recently shot up in demand, leading to the distribution of problematic counterfeit products.

Because of the sensitive nature of discussing producing and consuming illegal substances, all names in this article have been changed.

SWITCHING TO WAX

Marijuana extract, also referred to as dabs or wax, is a sticky yellow substance up to six times stronger than herbal marijuana. People today buy vape cartridges containing marijuana extracts and are able to screw them onto their vape devices.

According to the Center on Addiction, a typical marijuana joint yields around 15 percent THC, whereas marijuana wax can be more than 90 percent.

Georgia State freshman, John, recently switched from smoking marijuana herb to vaping marijuana wax because of convenience and subtlety.

"It's so discreet that it can be used pretty much anywhere with hardly any risk," he said. "The smell is almost nonexistent compared to most other forms of consumption that involve smoking."

John values wax because he feels it is a safer alternative to the tar deposited in the lungs after traditional smoking methods.

"I think using dab pens is much better for your lungs because it minimizes the amount you need to smoke," John said. "It's generally more concentrated and it doesn't produce the tar you get from burning regular weed plant material. That's why I stopped smoking a lot of bud and switched to wax."

Unlike in legalized states, cartridges bought in Georgia, where marijuana remains illegal, can be risky. Some Georgia State students have found that buying them comes with the risk of unknowingly purchasing counterfeit — and potentially dangerous — cartridges.

SELLING HOMEMADE CARTRIDGES

Dab pen users in illegal states should be aware of homemade cartridges. Empty cartridges can easily be refilled with unregulated, DIY extracts. Thanks to the technology of today, what once was a time-consuming day long process of mixing and

boiling, can now be finished in less than eight hours with the help of the Magical Butter Botanical Extractor Machine, a small device resembling an electric kettle, offered on Amazon and at Walmart.

Brian uses the Magical Butter Botanical Extractor Machine to make his own wax out of his dorm.

"You put your flower in there and put grain alcohol in and mix it around with the weed," Brian said. "The Magical Butter machine is going to spin it around for anywhere from like four to eight hours. Then after that, you just heat it up to burn off all the alcohol. Then you have your extract."

Ingredients for extracting oil are often flammable solvents including butane or alcohol. Sometimes these solvents are not completely evaporated, causing the smoker to inhale it and according to the Center on Addiction, inhaling butane-extracted oils can be harmful.

Leafly, the largest cannabis website in the world, with over 15 million monthly visitors and 40 million page views across its website and mobile applications, ranks CO2 dab cartridges the safest on the market.

"The FDA has labeled CO2 safe for industrial extractions, making it a much less controversial solvent than petroleum-based hydrocarbons such as butane or propane," Leafly said.

The process of using CO2 to extract marijuana concentrate involves a heavy understanding of chemistry and large, expensive machinery. The CO2 gas is pressurized into a liquid before being mixed with finely ground marijuana, acting as the solvent that separates the compound.

But just because a cartridge appears legitimate on the outside doesn't mean its contents are pure. Dealers can simply purchase original packaging and place

their homemade cartridges inside.

CHECKING WHERE IT'S FROM

"They come in a small cardboard box with a product cut out so you can see the cart, as well as a short description of the strain and effect and then it lists the content," John said.

There is a way to determine whether a product is genuine — customers just have to be willing to check.

"As far as identifying authentic cartridges, at least for the ones I get, there's a serial number on the bottom that you can look up in the specific company's database," Brian said.

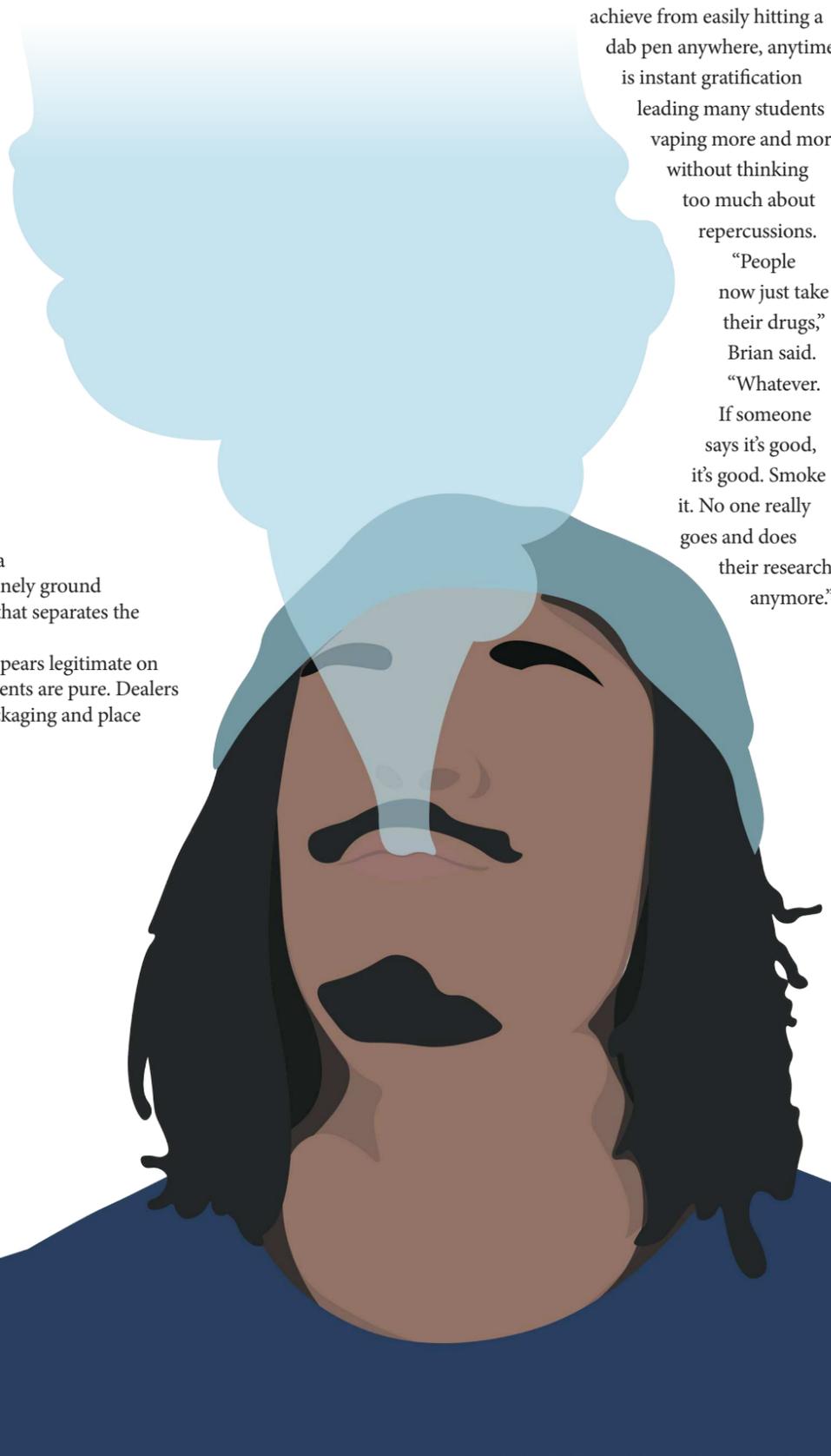
Additionally, the general practice of vaping dab cartridges poses a greater risk of dependence than

traditional ways of smoking weed. The quick high users achieve from easily hitting a dab pen anywhere, anytime is instant gratification leading many students vaping more and more without thinking too much about repercussions.

"People now just take their drugs," Brian said.

"Whatever.

If someone says it's good, it's good. Smoke it. No one really goes and does their research anymore."



ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO GET HIGH

- Oil Vape - classic and discreet
- Flower Vape - for vaping herb
- Dab Rig - extremely pure, for experienced stoners
- THC Oil - for use with food
- Weed Capsules - simply take a pill

E-CIGARETTE USAGE

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:
2011: 1.7 percent
2017: 11.7 percent

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS:
2011: .6 percent
2017: 3.3 percent