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Task Force Created to Respond to Rise of Edibles Consumption at Public Schools Hosts Territory-Wide Workshops

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The V.I. Dept. of Education said Monday that the Edibles Taskforce — a joint effort between Education, the V.I.P.D and the Dept. of Licensing and Consumer Affairs established to combat the rise in the consumption of marijuana-laced food and beverage products among teens, has partnered with the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention Foundation and the Virgin Islands HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) organization to present a series of workshops titled “Positive Vibes Alone”, which offers comprehensive education to students on substance misuse, with an emphasis on decision-making, self-efficacy, and refusal skills.

To date, the workshops have been presented to more than 6,000 students attending the territory’s public junior high and high schools, and were held in the St. Croix District, Aug. 22-24; in the St.

Thomas-St. John District, Oct. 24-31; and in January, will be presented to students attending the VIDE's Virtual Academy Pilot Program, D.O.E. said.

Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, assistant Dept. of Health commissioner [disclosed in March](#) there was growing evidence that young people are abusing cannabis/marijuana edibles. She said young people in schools are using the edibles without understanding the side and possible long-term effects of these edibles that look and in some instances taste like candy.

Lead presenter at the workshops, Amulen Wirsiy, a public health analyst with the CDC Foundation said the workshops were based on findings from the 2017 USVI Youth Behavior Risk Survey.

“Our program utilizes relevant research to teach the youth of our community about the long- and short-term health impacts of substance misuse and abuse in an engaging way—to meet our students where they are,” she said. “We seek to prevent substance abuse, prolong the onset of the initiation of use, and emphasize healthy decisions. Hopefully, lessons learned in our program will prove to be useful in more than one realm of our students’ lives.”

She added, “For generations, substance misuse and abuse has been seen as a morality issue, when, in fact, it has a biological and behavioral explanation,” she said. “Given the collective changes in society and the consideration of our community’s relationship with substances, it is imperative to educate youth on making and maintaining healthy decisions and boundaries as they navigate life.”

Other presenters included Rodney Querrad of USVI HIDTA, along with representatives from the Virgin Islands National Guard, U.S. Attorney’s Office, U.S. Marshal Service, Virgin Islands Police Department, and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

VIPD Acting Commissioner Jason Marsh said, “Bringing awareness to the forefront as a team ensures that we provide all available resources to our community as we combat this trend. Early and constant education to our students and community about the effects of edibles and various types of drugs, is an investment into, not only the individuals, but also the future of our home.”

Assistant Education Commissioner Victor Somme III praised the effort. “We have been pleased to work closely with our partners in the Edibles Taskforce to help educate our students and community about the dangers of edibles and other illicit drug use,” he said. “Our outreach has taken us across the territory, and we will continue to do everything we can to ensure our students and families are well-equipped with the knowledge they need to be safe.”

Additional educational workshops on edibles will be held throughout the community in the coming months and a series of informational radio and social media ads are set for release, Education said.