



Association of Respiratory
Nurse Specialists

E-cigarettes: an evidence update

A report commissioned by Public Health England

Key messages

1. Smokers who have tried other methods of quitting without success could be encouraged to try e-cigarettes (EC) to stop smoking and stop smoking services should support smokers using EC to quit by offering them behavioural support.
2. Encouraging smokers who cannot or do not want to stop smoking to switch to EC could help reduce smoking related disease, death and health inequalities.
3. There is no evidence that EC are undermining the long-term decline in cigarette smoking among adults and youth, and may in fact be contributing to it. Despite some experimentation with EC among never smokers, EC are attracting very few people who have never smoked into regular EC use.
4. Recent studies support the Cochrane Review findings that EC can help people to quit smoking and reduce their cigarette consumption. There is also evidence that EC can encourage quitting or cigarette consumption reduction even among those not intending to quit or rejecting other support. More research is needed in this area.
5. When used as intended, EC pose no risk of nicotine poisoning to users, but e-liquids should be in 'childproof' packaging. The accuracy of nicotine content labelling currently raises no major concerns.
6. There has been an overall shift towards the inaccurate perception of EC being as harmful as cigarettes over the last year in contrast to the current expert estimate that using EC is around 95% safer than smoking.
7. Whilst protecting non-smoking children and ensuring the products on the market are as safe and effective as possible are clearly important goals, new regulations currently planned should also maximise the public health opportunities of EC.
8. Continued vigilance and research in this area are needed.

Question & Answers

Q- Are e-cigarettes safe?

A- The evidence indicates that they carry a fraction of the risk of smoking cigarettes but are not risk free. If a person is smoking tobacco then we know that they have a 50% of dying of a smoking related disease often in middle age.

Q- Should I ask patients if they use an e-cigarette?

A- Yes, this should be asked as part of a medical history in addition to tobacco smoking history and other substances e.g. cannabis. It should also be recorded in the notes and any advice or referrals made. Some people will have '**switched**' to e-cigarette and stopped using tobacco and others may be using an e-cigarette to '**quit**' tobacco. Some may be using tobacco and an e-cigarette depending on the circumstances and this is referred to as '**dual use**'. We should encourage all and especially the 'quitter' to accept a referral to local stop smoking services for support to aid their quit. Receiving behavioural support along with their e-cigarette will improve their chances of quitting tobacco long term.

Q- A patient who is keen to quit smoking and is struggling to be successful; he has tried a range of smoking cessation medication and asks if you think he should try an e-cigarette?

A- This report recommends supporting the decision of the patient to use an e-cigarette and also to refer to the local stop smoking service for support.

Q- Can they be used in hospitals?

A- This will depend on each hospital's policy; many are currently reviewing their policy regarding smoke free sites taking into account NICE guidance and this report. Each trust will need to take into account the risk of fire from the electrical elements of e-cigarettes and other substances e.g. oxygen. This report does not support a blanket ban in organisations.

Q- Can e-cigarettes be prescribed?

A- New regulations come into force in 2016 when companies can apply for a medicines licence from the MHRA. This report supports having products available on prescription to support people quitting smoking and recommends that the license process may need streamlining as e-cigarette manufacturers are often small companies unlike the pharmaceutical industry.

Q- What e-cigarettes they look like?

1st Generation



2nd Generation

3rd Generation



Written by Wendy Preston (27/08/15)

The full Public Health England, review “E-cigarettes: an evidence update” can be found via the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/e-cigarettes-an-evidence-update>