

Vape Pens and E-cigarettes

Electronic cigarettes and “vape pens” have become increasingly popular, with marketing strategies aimed at teens and young adults. Today, more teenagers smoke e-cigarettes than regular cigarettes.

After exposure to nicotine, young adults become vulnerable to addiction. They may also have trouble concentrating, experience mood disorders, or develop reduced impulse control.

What are e-cigarettes and how do they work?

E-cigarettes, or e-cigs, are sometimes referred to as “e-hookahs,” “vapes,” or “vape pens”. These e-cigs produce an aerosol by heating a liquid usually containing the highly addictive drug nicotine (found in cigars, cigarettes, and other tobacco products). This liquid is inhaled into the lungs. Unlike traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes have replaceable cartridges. Some of these cartridges are fruit, alcohol, or dessert flavored, disguising that they contain nicotine and other toxic ingredients. Besides nicotine and flavoring, e-cigarettes sometimes contain heavy metals, lead, formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, and other carcinogens, which may lead to respiratory problems.

E-cigarettes can also deliver marijuana and other drugs in the same fashion.

These smoking devices come in all shapes and sizes; a trendy brand of e-cigarette, JUUL, is shaped like a USB flash drive. According to the manufacturer, a single JUUL pod contains as much nicotine as a pack of 20 regular cigarettes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately two-thirds of JUUL consumers aged 15-24 did not know JUUL always contained nicotine.

What are the health effects of e-cigarettes?

Like traditional cigarettes, e-cigs have many health effects and are just as addictive. However, since they are relatively new, the full extent of their damage is not yet known. Currently, scientists and doctors have found:

- Nicotine found in e-cigarettes harms brain development in young people and adolescents. On average, the brain continues to develop in a person until they reach their early to mid-twenties.
- Using nicotine in adolescence can harm the parts of the brain that control mood, impulse control, learning and retention, and attention span.
- E-cigarette aerosol contains cancer-causing chemicals and particles that reach deep into the lungs.
- Using nicotine in adolescence can increase the likelihood of addiction to other drugs in the future.
- Defective e-cigarette batteries have caused fires and explosions, some of which have caused severe injury.

Regulations

E-cigarettes are a 2.15 billion dollar industry in the United States, and marketing and advertising strategies follow those of conventional tobacco products. These strategies are known to target teens and young adults. The growing e-cigarette business has created public health concerns surrounding adolescent usage.

In response, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began regulating the sale of e-cigarettes in stores and online in 2016. According to new legislation, if the customer's photo ID states that they are under 18 years of age, they may not legally purchase tobacco or nicotine products, including e-cigarettes. Free samples are no longer legal, and tobacco vending machines are restricted from most facilities where teens and young adults may be able to access them.

On January 2, 2020, the FDA finalized an enforcement policy that prohibits the sale of prefilled cartridge e-cigarettes in any flavor other than tobacco or menthol unless authorized by the FDA. FDA has since taken additional steps to ban certain companies from selling youth-appealing, flavored disposable e-cigarettes and flavored e-liquids without authorization.

Although these regulations have been enforced, many young people are still curious to try e-cigarettes due to widespread media campaigns and the relatively low cost of regular cigarettes.

What can I do to prevent my child from using e-cigarettes or help them to stop?

- Talk to your child or teen about the harmful effects of using e-cigarettes and other tobacco products.
- Set up an appointment with your healthcare provider to discuss the dangers of smoking and, if necessary, intervention methods.
- Speak with your child's teachers or administrators about enforcing drug-free policies and tobacco prevention curriculum.

Resources

- Know the Risks: <https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov>
- Center for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/electronic-cigarettes-e-cigarettes>

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