

The Daily Targum

E-cigarette use raises concerns

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With flavors like “chocolate treat” and “snappin’ apple,” purchasing VMR electronic cigarettes can make an adult feel like a kid in a candy store.

Public concerns have risen over the increasingly popular battery-operated devices known as e-cigarettes, often designed to look like conventional cigarettes but considered a healthier alternative.

First introduced to the U.S. market in 2006, e-cigarette users inhale nicotine, flavors and other chemicals through a vaporizing apparatus, according to the Epoch Times. Since e-cigarettes give users the nicotine fix they crave without the smoke, many people use the product to help them quit smoking regular cigarettes.

With industry experts estimating the market worth at \$2 billion, the product only continues to soar in popularity, reports The New York Times.

The Food and Drug Administration has been responsible for controlling the marketing and manufacturing of tobacco since 2009, according to the New Jersey Herald.

Unlike regular cigarettes and other tobacco products, e-cigarettes have yet to be federally regulated by the FDA and are only subject to state and local policies.

This means that unless prohibited by these individual state laws, e-cigarettes can legally be sold and marketed to minors.

Michael Steinberg, director of the Rutgers Tobacco Dependence Program, said although the public is getting impatient with the FDA, the facts about e-cigarettes are too ambiguous for any direct action to be taken.

“We need to find out how safe [e-cigarettes] are and then make informed scientific decisions from there,” Steinberg said.

The FDA is currently funding studies to gauge whether e-cigarettes are safe alternatives to regular cigarettes.

These studies will seek to determine the chemicals emitted by e-cigarettes, how people are using them, how they are being marketed and whether they can truly help people quit smoking. “If we do study them, and it turns out that they are more helpful than harmful, then banning them isn’t in the interest of public health either,” Steinberg said.

He estimates that federal regulations on e-cigarettes will be instated within the next two years. One thing almost everyone should universally agree on is that e-cigarettes should not be

marketed to minors.

Members of the public and the media, along with some government officials, have been pushing for these federal regulations or even a ban on e-cigarettes altogether.

The FDA intends to propose a regulation that would extend the agency's "tobacco product" authorities, which currently only includes cigarettes, cigarette tobacco, roll-your-own tobacco and smokeless tobacco, according to the FDA's website.

Further research is needed to assess the potential public health benefits and risks of electronic cigarettes and other novel tobacco products.

In a press release, director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Tom Frieden said e-cigarette use is growing rapidly, but it is unclear whether they will increase or decrease the use of traditional cigarettes.

E-cigarettes appear to have far fewer toxins than traditional cigarettes, but their impact on long-term health must be studied. Research is also needed to assess how e-cigarette marketing could impact the use of traditional cigarettes by young people.

The CDC found that in just one year, the percentage of high school students who said they had used e-cigarettes more than doubled.

New Jersey banned the sale of e-cigarettes to anyone under the age of 19 as part of a 2010 amendment to the New Jersey's Smoke-Free Air Act, according to the New Jersey Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy's website.

According to a document provided by Donna Richardson, clinic coordinator of the Tobacco Dependence Program, 28 other states have since enacted similar laws.

The report, written by the staff of Senator Richard J. Durbin, was based on surveys of nine of the top e-cigarette manufacturers.

The results indicated that many e-cigarette companies are marketing their products toward a younger demographic. Tactics include creating flavors that may appeal to children and promoting e-cigarettes in youth-oriented places like baseball games and music festivals. The study also found that warning labels on e-cigarette products lack uniformity and may be misleading.

Richardson said older tobacco addicts have told her they worry their grandchildren will start becoming addicted to tobacco through e-cigarettes.

She said "hookah e-cigarettes" and different flavored e-cigarettes are sold in smoke shops along Easton Avenue, and she sees many college students using them.

Cigarettes of any kind should not be marketed to children, said Kassondra Dupas, a School of Arts and Sciences junior.

"Addiction is powerful, especially when it begins at an early age," Dupas said.

According to nj.com, Gov. Chris Christie proposed a bill this February that would place higher taxes on smokeless tobacco products.

Minnesota is the only state that currently taxes e-cigarettes at the same rate as other tobacco products, according to an article in nj.com.

Richardson thinks equal taxes should be placed on e-cigarettes and all other forms of tobacco products.

She is skeptical about the claim that e-cigarettes can help people stop smoking traditional cigarettes.

Of 100 highly addicted patients at the Tobacco Dependence Program, only one would report that e-cigarettes helped them quit smoking.

Richardson thinks e-cigarettes should have been regulated as medical devices, but previous court decisions prevented that.

Her next best hope is that the FDA will act on marketing, will require package ingredient lists and provide health providers and educators with guidelines and clear information to pass on to e-cigarette users.

Until then, the tobacco industry is the only one winning.

“Right now, the people benefitting are the people selling an unregulated product that people are inhaling into their lungs,” Richardson said.

http://www.dailytargum.com/news/e-cigarette-use-raises-concerns/article_1fc91e1e-c6ac-11e3-952d-0017a43b2370.html