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E-Cigs Appeal to Teens Who Otherwise Wouldn't Smoke, Study Says

Alexandra Sifferlin, December 15, 2014

High schoolers are more likely to smoke e-cigs than regular cigarettes

E-cigarettes may attract young people who wouldn't ordinarily go for regular cigarettes, a new study suggests, thereby expanding the number of youth exposed to addictive nicotine.

Researchers surveyed 1,941 Hawaii high school students about their smoking behaviors as well as their relative risk for picking up smoking. Risk was assessed based on factors like sensation-seeking and prevalence of smoking among peers, parent support and academic involvement.

They found, in their study published in the journal *Pediatrics*, that about 17% of the high schoolers smoked e-cigarettes only, 12% smoked both e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes, 3% only smoked conventional cigarettes, and 68% said they did not smoke.

Students who smoked tobacco cigarettes, or who smoked both cigarettes and e-cigs, fell within the highest risk category for picking up the habit. E-cigarette users were lower on the risk threshold than those two groups, suggesting it's attracting young people who wouldn't necessarily be interested in conventional smoking. E-cigarette users and dual smokers were also more likely than nonsmokers to believe e-cigarettes are healthier than regular cigarettes.

“The fact that e-cigarette only users were intermediate in risk status

between nonusers and dual users raises the possibility that e-cigarettes are recruiting medium-risk adolescents, who otherwise would be less susceptible to tobacco product use,” the authors write.

Part of this perception and attraction to e-cigs could be the fact that they are heavily marketed in public places the authors suggest.

The trouble with e-cigs is that there’s still not enough research to make any definitive conclusions on their risks or benefits. Some experts argue that since e-cigarettes have fewer unhealthy components than traditional cigarettes, they are a better option. They have even been trumpeted as a possible quitting device. Other experts argue that e-cigarettes are just another gateway to nicotine use, and are therefore unacceptable. Whether young people can access them and get hooked is of great concern.

Currently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) only regulates e-cigarettes marketed for therapeutic purposes, and many products continue to be marketed and sold with little FDA interference. The agency has proposed a rule that would give it more regulatory power over e-cigarettes that would look similar to other tobacco products, but nothing has been finalized. The FDA has also suggested a ban on sale of e-cigs to minors. The agency admits there’s a lot that consumers don’t know about e-cigs, like if they lead young people to smoke other tobacco products or how much nicotine is actually inhaled in each use.

<http://time.com/3633431/e-cigarettes-teens-smoke/>