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## Surgeon General warning: More kids use e-cigarettes than tobacco

By Susan K. Livio | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

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**TRENTON** -- More teens now choose electronic cigarettes over tobacco, a trend that is giving them a false sense of safety and putting their health at risk, the U.S. Surgeon General said [in a report](#) released on Thursday.

E-cigarettes contain nicotine, an addictive chemical that in the developing brain of a person under 25 may also cause mood disorders and problems with learning and impulse control, according to the report by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy.

The devices also contain chemical flavorings linked to serious lung disease; benzene, which is found in car exhaust; and heavy metals, such as nickel, tin, and lead, Murthy's report said.

"One of every six high school students has used e-cigarettes in the past 30 days, and these products are now more popular with middle and high school students than traditional cigarettes," according to Murthy's report, the first examination by a federal agency of e-cigarette use among adolescents and young adults.

E-cigarette use among middle and high school students has more than tripled from 2011 to 2015, according to the report containing new survey data.

"As these products have been advertised more heavily, they have become much more popular among youth in middle and high school, and among young adults ages 18-25," Murthy's report said.

E-cigarettes have been credited with helping die-hard tobacco smokers kick the cancer-causing habit. The Electronic Cigarette Industry Trade Association issued a statement expressing its "dismay" at the "far-from neutral examination of the science."

"The report ignores the recent dramatic declines in youth smoking, in favor of raising alarm about the small number of youths who use electronic cigarettes," the association's statement also said. "While in an ideal world no one would start using nicotine, if electronic cigarette use is reducing the number of people taking up smoking, then there are clear public health gains."

But public health experts -- Murthy now among the the most high-profile -- are saying the \$3.5 billion e-cigarette industry is also succeeding in luring teens and young adults with products that taste like candy and fruit.

Six in 10 teens in a national survey said they did not know that e-cigarettes were harmful, the report said.

Vaping isn't stopping them trying tobacco, either. In 2015, nearly 6 of 10 high school cigarette smokers also used e-cigarettes, the report said.

In the report, Murthy called on including e-cigarettes in all state and local restrictions on smoking and raise taxes on the sales of the products.

"Scientists are still learning more about how e-cigarettes affect health. However, there is already enough evidence to justify efforts to prevent e-cigarette use by young people," according to Murthy's report. "Because most tobacco use starts during adolescence, actions to protect our nation's young people from a lifetime of nicotine addiction are critical."

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, or GASP, urged state lawmakers and policy makers to take action to stop the "out of control" e-cigarette use among youth.

"Time keeps on ticking, and Trenton sits on the sidelines to curb this epidemic. New Jersey has yet to ban flavored e-cigarettes, even though the state bans flavored regular cigarettes, except menthol and clove, Blumenfeld said.

"The state can't even track who is selling e-cigarettes because they don't require statewide licensing of such retailers, like they do for cigarette retailers. It's impossible to know who is selling these products and enforce laws not to sell to young people," she said.

Two years ago, Gov. Chris Christie proposed taxing e-cigarette products at the same rate as tobacco products, \$2.70 per purchase, to boost state revenue and deter young users from vaping. The idea was abandoned.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced in the summer it intends to begin regulating e-cigarettes like tobacco products, beginning in 2018.

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