

E-cigarettes, a poor smoking-cessation tool, use 19 harmful chemicals

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(Medical Xpress)—It's no easy task to quit smoking and the lure of an e-cigarette, which claims to mimic the smoking experience without the harmful chemicals, seems a dream come true for many smokers. But with no FDA regulations, that dream could quickly turn into a nightmare, said Philip McAndrew, MD, Loyola University Health System physician and smoking-cessation expert. The truth is that little is known about the chemicals e-cigarette smokers are inhaling and the increase in the number of adolescents smoking.

"In our culture we have this idea that something new is something better no matter how little we know about it or how little it's regulated," McAndrew said. "There is no clear evidence that e-cigarettes help with [smoking cessation](#) and the lack of FDA regulation has led to the use of at least 19 [harmful chemicals](#) in the devices, some that are cancer-causing carcinogens."

The e-cigarettes contain nicotine, but also a high concentration of [propylene glycol](#), which is a hazard if inhaled. This [chemical](#) is what provides the "smoke." There is no research on the effects the chemical has on the lungs when inhaled at this concentration. What is known is that The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health lists propylene glycol as an inhalant risk and recommends immediate fresh air if the chemical is inhaled.

"E-cigarettes are really a wolf in sheep's clothing. People think it's a safe alternative to cigarettes, but the reality is we don't know. There are so

many important safety questions we don't have answers to. We don't know who is producing them, exactly what chemicals are in them, if the construction of the devices are safe and the effects these chemicals can have on a person's health," McAndrew said.

The City of Chicago's recent ban on e-cigarettes use is similar to the ban on regular cigarettes and requires retailers to keep electronic cigarettes behind the counter like traditional cigarettes. McAndrew believes this is a good start, but more needs to be done with regulations.

"We were seeing a decline in the number of adolescents [smoking](#), but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention the number of middle school and [high school students](#) who have tried e-cigarettes doubled in a year. This is a tremendous health risk. The kids see them as a cool, new tech device, but what they really are is an inroad to a nicotine addiction," McAndrew said.

McAndrew also doesn't see them as an effective tool for smoking cessation.

"I am a firm believer in methods that have been proven effective to help people quit smoking such as oral medication, nicotine replacement that is regulated and counseling. That triad has the best percentage of not only helping people to quit but to stay that way," McAndrew said. "E-cigarettes do not separate the nicotine from the oral fixation, which is extremely important when a person is trying to stop smoking."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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