

## Seeing e-cigarette use encourages young adult tobacco users to light up

May 27 2014

---



"It's important to note that there could be effects of being in the company of an e-cigarette user, particularly for young smokers," King said. "For example, it's possible that seeing e-cigarette use may promote more smoking behavior and less quitting." Credit: University of Chicago/Kevin Jiang

Seeing people use electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) increases the urge to smoke among regular combustible cigarettes users, according to a new study of young adult smokers. This elevated desire is as strong as when observing someone smoking a regular cigarette, report scientists from

the University of Chicago online, May 21, in *Tobacco Control*. The study is the first to investigate the behavioral effects of exposure to e-cigarette use in a controlled setting.

"E-cigarette use has increased dramatically over the past few years, so observations and passive exposure will no doubt increase as well," said study author Andrea King, PhD, professor of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience at the University of Chicago. "It's important to note that there could be effects of being in the company of an e-cigarette user, particularly for young smokers. For example, it's possible that seeing e-cigarette use may promote more smoking behavior and less quitting."

E-cigarettes deliver nicotine via a heated solution of compounds and flavorings. This vapor is inhaled by users and closely resembles the smoke released by combustible cigarettes. Researchers have looked at the health effects of e-cigarette vapor, but no studies have been conducted on the visual effects of e-cigarette use.

To investigate, King and her team recruited 60 young adult smokers. Participants in the study were told they were being tested on their responses to a variety of social interactions. They were paired with an actor, pretending to be a participant, who would smoke an e-cigarette or a regular cigarette during a conversation. The actual study subjects were measured for their urge to smoke at multiple points before and after this interaction.

The team found that seeing e-cigarette use significantly increased the observer's desire to smoke both regular and [e-cigarettes](#). The increases in desire to smoke a regular cigarette after observing e-cigarette use were as strong as after observing regular cigarette use. However, observing regular cigarette use did not increase participants' desire to smoke an e-cigarette. As a control, actors also drank from a bottle of water while engaging in conversation with the participant to mimick hand-to-mouth

behavior. No increase in desire for either regular or e-cigarettes were seen in this scenario.

"Whether participants were exposed to someone smoking a combustible or an e-cigarette, the urge to smoke a combustible cigarette was just as high in either condition," King said. "We know from past research that seeing regular cigarette use is a potent cue for someone to want to smoke. We did not know if seeing e-cigarette use would produce the same [effect](#). But that is exactly what we found. When we re-tested participants 20 minutes after exposure, the desire to smoke remained elevated."



This shows an e-cigarette (right) as compared with a combustible cigarette (left).  
Credit: University of Chicago/Kevin jiang

With increasing e-cigarette sales nationwide, King believes that more

attention needs to be placed not only on the health ramifications for users, but on the secondary, passive effects on observers.

"This study was our first investigation, and there are still many unanswered questions. We don't know about the effects on a non-smoker or a person who has quit [smoking](#) or if responses are different for the various e-cigarette brands," she said. "But if the results do generalize and we show this in other groups, it's important to consider policy going forward in terms of reducing harm for both users and observers of e-cigarettes."

**More information:** "Passive exposure to electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use increases desire for combustible and e-cigarettes in young adult smokers," *Tobacco Control*, 2014.

Provided by University of Chicago Medical Center

Citation: Seeing e-cigarette use encourages young adult tobacco users to light up (2014, May 27) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-05-e-cigarette-young-adult-tobacco-users.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--