

E-cigarette use highest among young adults, US report finds

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Almost 4 percent of all adult Americans use them, new survey shows.

(HealthDay)—In a first-of-its-kind look at electronic cigarettes, a new U.S. government study reports that nearly 13 percent of American adults have tried e-cigarettes at least once and almost 4 percent use them.

According to the 2014 National Health Interview Survey by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the popularity of e-cigarettes rose slightly among men (about 14 percent) and dipped among women (about 11 percent).

But the most dramatic usage differences break along age lines, the poll of nearly 37,000 adults found. Almost 22 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 said they had tried the battery-powered aerosol nicotine-delivery device, while usage among those 65 and older was less than 4 percent.

Current users also tend to be younger, the report noted, with more than 5 percent of those 18 to 24 saying they now use e-cigarettes, compared with just over 1 percent of those 65 and older.

And among never-smokers, the usage was also highest among the 18-to-24 age group.

The report found that e-cigarette popularity is greatest among white and Native American adults, with nearly 5 and 11 percent, respectively, now using them. Only about 2 percent of blacks and Hispanics use them.

E-cigs also seem to curry much more favor among those who now smoke traditional cigarettes, or those who only recently kicked the habit: About 48 percent of current smokers have tried an e-cigarette and one in six currently use them. About 55 percent of those who stopped smoking just in the last year have tried them, and 22 percent said they currently use them.

By contrast, only about 3 percent of never-smoking adults said they've tried an e-cigarette, and less than half of 1 percent said they use them now. Among young (aged 18 to 24) never-smokers, however, almost 10 percent said they've tried one out.

So what's driving the numbers?

"We really can't answer that question," said study co-author Charlotte Schoenborn, a statistician with the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics in the CDC's division of health interview statistics. "This was the first year that the NCHS has even asked these questions. So we can only speculate as to why, as we watch to see how the trends unfold over time."

Schoenborn and her colleague Renee Gindi outline their findings in the

CDC's October NCHS report released Oct. 28.

Erika Sward, assistant vice president for national advocacy with the American Lung Association, suggested that the CDC data will end up becoming a "very useful and much needed benchmark" for monitoring e-cigarettes.

"Electronic cigarettes are really the wild, wild West," Sward said. "There's absolutely no federal oversight of e-cigarettes, even though the FDA [U.S. Food and Drug Administration] has not found any e-cig to be safe or effective in helping smokers quit. And to our knowledge, no e-cigarette company has even applied to the FDA for approval as a smoking cessation product."

But many manufacturers market the devices that way anyway, she said.

"So the real take-away message is that the people who are most likely to use e-cigs are our most vulnerable adults: the young, current smokers, and those who have recently quit or are trying to quit," she said.

Sward added, "So just as we're seeing traditional cigarette use decline—after years of FDA regulation and state smoke-free policies and taxation—we're now seeing the tobacco industry continue its narrative of aggressively marketing e-cigarettes to younger people in the hopes of developing a whole new lifelong user.

"And until we act," she said, "troubling studies like this one suggest that we're on a path to a real public health crisis that will undo much of the progress that has been made to reduce tobacco use in the U.S."

The report comes on the heels of a recommendation by the nation's leading pediatricians group to raise the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products and e-cigarettes to 21 across the United States.

The new policy recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics, released Oct. 26, also called for the FDA to regulate e-cigarettes the same way it regulates other tobacco products.

More information: There's more on electronic cigarettes at the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#).

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