

# Health agency takes on advertising for electronic cigarettes (Update)

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In this April 23, 2014 file photo, a man smokes an electronic cigarette in Chicago. On Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2016, the U.S.'s lead public health agency focused its attack on electronic cigarettes on the issue of advertising, saying too many kids see the ads. There are bans on TV commercials and some other types of marketing for regular cigarettes but there are no restrictions on advertisements for e-cigarettes. Most states, though, ban the sale of e-cigarettes to minors. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh, File)

The nation's lead public health agency on Tuesday focused its attack on electronic cigarettes on the issue of advertising, saying too many kids see the ads.

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About 7 out of 10 kids said they've seen the ads, mostly in stores, according to survey results released Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

About 22,000 high school and middle school students were asked in 2014 if they saw e-cigarette ads—in stores, online or in magazines, movies and television.

The report doesn't prove advertising is actually causing more kids to pick up e-cigarettes and a trade group said the survey is flawed. But CDC officials worry e-cigarettes may hook a new generation on nicotine, and lead some to take up cigarettes—possibly reversing a long and gradual decline in smoking rates.

"Unfettered marketing of e-cigarettes has the potential to compromise decades of progress," said Brian King, a CDC expert on smoking issues.

Youth e-cigarette smoking rates have risen at a similar trajectory as spending on advertising, say officials at the Atlanta-based CDC. And researchers say advertising has, in the past, been a big driver of youth smoking of traditional cigarettes. Cigarette sales to minors are banned nationwide; most states now ban the sale of e-cigarettes to those under 18.

The federal health agency has been taking an unusually hard stand

against e-cigarettes, at a time when scientists still trying to determine if they are harmful. E-cigarettes have only been sold in the United States for about the past nine years.

E-cigarettes heat liquid nicotine into an inhalable vapor. Users get nicotine but not the thousands of chemicals, tar, or odor of regular cigarettes.

Scientists say nicotine is highly addictive and can be harmful for the developing brain. CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden said e-cigarettes can be a benefit if they help adult smokers quit, but kids should not be using them.

"They are not harmless," Frieden said Tuesday, in a call with reporters.

The Smoke-Free Alternatives Trade Association—an e-cigarette industry trade group—criticized the survey and CDC's stance.

"The CDC continues to mislead the public about the benefits of vapor products as far less harmful alternatives to smoking," the group's executive director, Cynthia Cabrera, said in a statement. "The CDC also fails to mention that teens are exposed to many other adult issues on the Internet, TV and movies, such as violence, sex and alcohol."

Cabrera said her group supports age restrictions on e-cigarette sales.

While smoking of traditional cigarettes has plummeted to about 9 percent among high schools students, e-cigarette use has become more common. Last year, about 13 percent said they'd used an e-cigarette in the previous month.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has been working on new rules for e-cigarettes and other, newer tobacco products. The

regulations—first proposed in 2014 and currently under White House review—are not expected to contain advertising restrictions.

Advocates want limits. "It's time for the White House to issue a strong final rule and end this unregulated experiment that threatens our kids," Matthew L. Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said in a statement.

**More information:** CDC report: [www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns)

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