

E-cigarettes may help adults switch from conventional cigarettes but encourage smoking among teens

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Credit: American Heart Association

E-cigarettes can be highly addictive, and kids who use them are more likely to start smoking regular cigarettes, concluded a panel of public health experts.

The [report](#) released this week by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine is one of the most comprehensive evaluations of existing research on e-cigarettes.

The [report](#) found that e-cigarettes may help adults switch from conventional tobacco-containing cigarettes, and that while the devices are probably less harmful than regular cigarettes, more research is needed, especially to determine the long-term [health](#) effects.

"When it got down to answering the questions about what the impacts on health are, there is still a lot to be learned," said David Eaton, of the University of Washington, who led the committee that reviewed the existing research and issued the report. "E-cigarettes cannot be simply categorized as either beneficial or harmful."

What health experts find concerning from the report is that teens and young adults who use nicotine-containing e-cigarettes are more likely to try conventional cigarettes. And use of e-cigarettes among U.S. [high school students](#) is on the rise, jumping from 1.5 percent in 2011 to 11.3 percent by 2016.

Researchers have theorized that one reason for the high usage among teens is the way e-cigarettes are marketed, often by promoting flavors like strawberries and cream that are popular among younger users.

A 2016 study from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that flavored [e-cigarette](#) products are used by nearly two-thirds of e-cigarette users. In addition, 44 percent of e-cigarette users reported experimenting with e-cigarettes because of the availability of flavors.

Yet there is still not enough long-term evidence to conclusively determine whether young people are just experimenting with e-cigarettes or becoming habitual smokers, according to the report.

Dr. Aruni Bhatnagar, a professor of medicine and director of the Diabetes and Obesity Center at the University of Louisville, said the perception of e-cigarettes as being safer can also make them more

appealing to younger users.

"The goal is to abstain from any other tobacco or nicotine products," said Bhatnagar.

American Heart Association CEO Nancy Brown said the report supports many of the recommendations made in the AHA's 2014 e-cigarette policy statement and shows "the jury is still out" on the benefits and harms of e-cigarettes.

"Until we have sufficient scientific data, we must have strong FDA regulation of these products and any new versions that come on the market," Brown said in a statement.

Provided by American Heart Association

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