

Ban e-cig flavors and misleading adverts to protect youth, says global respiratory group

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In a statement published in the *European Respiratory Journal*, a coalition of respiratory doctors and scientists from six continents have warned of the dangers posed to children and adolescents by electronic cigarettes.

They say there is mounting evidence that e-cigarettes damage health and are highly addictive, yet manufacturers are marketing them as "healthier" cigarettes and their popularity among young people is growing.

As a result, they are calling for an immediate ban on flavourings and on marketing e-cigarettes as lower risk alternatives to children and adolescents.

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies is a collaborative of nine organisations from North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia that was created to promote lung health worldwide.

The paper brings together a wide range of research findings on e-cigarettes. It highlights evidence that children and adolescents are highly susceptible to nicotine addiction, and that use of e-cigarettes has risen steeply in this age group to become the most commonly used tobacco-related product among adolescents in some countries.

The authors lay out a set of evidence-based recommendations for protecting youth from nicotine addiction and its harmful effects.

The paper was co-authored by Thomas Ferkol MD, Alexis Hartmann professor of paediatrics and professor of cell biology and physiology at Washington University in St. Louis, USA. He said: "Until recently, the risks of e-cigarettes and their rising popularity with children and adolescents were under-recognised or ignored. We wrote this statement to address growing public health concerns over [e-cigarette](#) use among youths.

"Product design, flavours, marketing, and perception of safety and acceptability have increased the appeal of e-cigarettes to young people. These products are 'normalising' smoking and leading to new generations addicted to nicotine."

The authors found growing evidence that e-cigarettes act as a "one-way bridge" to cigarette smoking in adolescents.

Professor Ferkol added: "Some people truly believe e-cigarettes could be used as a smoking cessation technique, but these products also are an entry to [nicotine addiction](#) and tobacco use in young people."

Charlotta Pisinger, clinical professor of tobacco control at Bispebjerg and Frederiksberg Hospital and University of Copenhagen, Denmark was also a co-author. She said: "Although exposure to potentially harmful ingredients from [electronic cigarettes](#) may be lower than traditional cigarettes, this does not mean that e-cigarettes are harmless.

"And when we're talking about children and adolescents who are trying e-cigarettes for the first time, we should not be comparing their use to traditional cigarettes. We should be comparing them to no tobacco use."

The paper puts forward a series of expert recommendations that the authors say will protect this vulnerable group. They state that e-cigarettes should be regulated in the same way as tobacco products and included in

smoke-free policies. They say that there should be a ban on sales to youths worldwide, which must be enforced. Advertising e-cigarettes as lower-risk alternatives directed to youths and young adults should cease.

The paper also calls for a ban on flavoured products, because there is evidence that flavourings draw [young people](#) to e-cigarettes. There are currently more than 7,500 different flavoured e-cigarettes and refills available. Finally, the authors recommended further research on the health effects of e-cigarettes as well as surveillance of use across different countries.

Regulation of e-cigarettes varies widely around the world. For example, legislation on a minimum age for buying e-cigarettes is non-existent or not enforced in most countries.

Dr. Aneesa Vanker, a senior specialist in paediatric pulmonology, at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, University of Cape Town, South Africa, was also a co-author the paper. She added: "E-cigarettes are largely unregulated, particularly in low and middle-income countries. They are marketed as a smoking cessation tool and a safer alternative to tobacco cigarettes.

"However, there is growing evidence that nicotine has many acute and long-term adverse effects, including addiction. Young people are at particular risk for this.

"We want local, national, and regional decision-makers to recognise the growing public health threat that e-cigarettes pose to children and adolescents. Inhaling something other than air is never good for a child's lungs."

More information: Ferkol TW, Farber HJ, La Grutta S, et al. Electronic cigarette use in youths: a position statement of the Forum of

International Respiratory Societies. *Eur Respir J* 2018; 51: 1800278.

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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