

Uncontrolled online marketing of e-cigarettes putting youth at risk, study finds

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Only 10 percent of New Zealand websites selling vaping products require proof of age before purchase, researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington, have found.

In an article published in today's *New Zealand Medical Journal*, the researchers examine the [online sales](#) and marketing of e-cigarettes and look at the presence of safeguards to protect children from experimentation and uptake.

The study is the first to analyse the online marketing of e-cigarettes in New Zealand.

The researchers found 59 New Zealand-based websites selling e-cigarettes. Of these, 68 percent had no detectable [health](#) warnings displayed and only 25 percent mentioned [nicotine addiction](#).

Lead author Nivy Gurram says online retailers are failing to provide adequate health information for consumers, and to prevent children and young people accessing their websites.

Most of the websites (92 percent) used at least one social networking site as part of their marketing, including Facebook (90 percent), Instagram (61 percent) and Twitter (39 percent). Of the 52 accessible YouTube videos linked to New Zealand sales websites, none had health or addiction warnings.

"Social media platforms offer marketers extensive reach at a low cost and are valued among those marketing to youth because of their ability to influence peer-to-peer networks."

Ms Gurram said the websites were offering e-cigarettes and e-liquids at prices that were within the reach of many New Zealand children and adolescents, with the cheapest e-cigarette priced at NZD\$9.95 and the cheapest 10ml e-liquid refill on sale for NZD\$3.50. In comparison, a pack of 20 cigarettes was on sale for NZD\$24.50 at one online New Zealand store.

Of the five most popular online New Zealand vape companies (using Google Trends), two offered more than 200 flavours on their websites. For these companies, by far the most common flavours were fruit/candy and 'dessert'.

Ms Gurram says previous US research has shown sweet flavours to be the most appealing to adolescents.

"Flavoured [e-cigarettes](#) are associated with higher chances of user initiation and weaker perceptions of tobacco harm among youth."

Another author of the study, Associate Professor George Thomson from the University's Department of Public Health, says the government is failing to enforce legislation which it says prohibits the sale and supply of nicotine 'vaping products that are manufactured from tobacco' to those under 18.

"The government is also not enforcing the law on [tobacco advertising](#) and sponsorship, which also applies to such nicotine vaping products, according to the Ministry of Health website.

"If there is any suggestion that the nicotine is synthetic, and not from tobacco, then urgent legislation should have been enacted in 2018, after a court ruled vaping sales legal in New Zealand."

He is urging the government to introduce new and more effective regulations to reduce the ease with which young people can purchase vaping products online.

"New Zealand urgently needs regulation that prevents the seductive marketing of these products to young people, while at the same time supporting smokers who cannot quit using other means to transition to vaping."

Earlier this week, more than 60 people representing health organisations, tertiary institutions and schools signed an open to letter to Associate Minister of Health, Hon. Jenny Salesa asking her to urgently introduce legislation to regulate vaping.

The research paper, "Electronic cigarette online marketing by New Zealand vendors" is published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*.

Provided by University of Otago

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