

Few adult smokers and non-smokers think e-cigarettes have lower levels of harmful chemicals than cigarettes, finds study

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About half of cigarette smokers and young adult non-smokers believe that nicotine-based electronic cigarettes have the same amount or even

more harmful chemicals than regular tobacco-based cigarettes, according to a recent Rutgers study.

The study, published in *Addiction*, measured perceived levels of [harmful chemicals](#) in e-cigarettes compared with cigarettes using national samples of more than 1,000 adults ages 18 and older who smoke cigarettes and 1,000-plus adults ages 18 to 29 who are non-smokers.

The study also measured associations with e-cigarette/cigarette relative harm perceptions, e-cigarette use and interest. About 20% of all participants believed that e-cigarettes contain fewer harmful chemicals than cigarettes, while about 30% responded that they did not know how the levels compared.

"Our results were interesting to see given that previous review reports suggest e-cigarettes expose users to fewer types and lower levels of harmful and potentially harmful chemicals than cigarettes," said Olivia Wackowski of Rutgers Center for Tobacco Studies, an associate professor at the Rutgers School of Public Health and lead researcher of the study. "It was also interesting to find that only about half of adult smokers who thought e-cigarettes have fewer harmful chemicals also thought e-cigarettes are less harmful to health."

E-cigarette harm perception relative to typical cigarettes is a common question included on major national health and tobacco surveys in the United States. However, surveys of e-cigarettes typically haven't included a question about the perceived exposure to or level of harmful chemicals in e-cigarettes relative to cigarettes.

According to the study researchers, measuring perceptions of e-cigarette and cigarette chemical exposure is important because e-cigarette communications often directly refer to chemicals in some way, which may impact perceptions about chemicals and harms from using [e-](#)

[cigarettes](#) compared to cigarettes.

The study also found an interest in [e-cigarette use](#) was significantly higher among those who perceive them to have fewer harmful chemicals than traditional cigarettes and to be less harmful.

Other authors of the study include Michelle T. Bover Manderski, Stefanie K. Gratale and Caitlin V. Weiger of the Rutgers Center for Tobacco Studies as well as Richard J. O'Connor of Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center.

More information: Olivia A. Wackowski et al, Perceptions about Levels of Harmful Chemicals in E-cigarettes Relative to Cigarettes, and Associations with Relative E-cigarette Harm Perceptions, E-cigarette Use and Interest, *Addiction* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/add.16258](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.16258)

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