

# Digital games on vaping devices could lure more youth to nicotine addiction

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In an "Industry Watch" [research paper](#) in the journal *Tobacco Control*, two scientists at the University of California, Riverside, raise the alarm on new electronic cigarette products equipped with touch screens,

animated displays, and built-in games. Because the products are user-friendly and attractive to youth, they may couple nicotine addiction with gaming disorder, the researchers caution.

Of particular concern to the researchers is that coupling nicotine to existing youth behaviors, such as video gaming and screen time use, could broaden the smart electronic cigarette market to include youth with no prior interest in nicotine products, while also reinforcing nicotine addiction among current users.

"Our lab is constantly monitoring the electronic cigarette market for new devices, especially ones that target youth and [young adults](#)," said Man Wong, first author of the paper and an assistant in the lab of Prue Talbot, a professor of the graduate division. "One of these devices, Craftbox V-Play, can run Pac-Man, Tetris, and F22—classic arcade games. Other devices that we found alarming were vapes that had digital games that encourage users to vape, vapes with animations that change as users puff, vapes that have built-in bluetooth and can be customized with personal photos, and vapes with celebrity endorsements that offer promotional trading cards."

Talbot stressed that it is critical to pay attention to shifting trends in vape designs, especially disposable vapes that are user-friendly and popular among youth.

"Disposable vapes were relatively simple two years ago, and functioned as nicotine delivery devices," she said. "Now they are designed to resemble and include features of smart phones and handheld gaming devices. These features make vapes more attractive to youth."

Talbot and Wong believe the new devices need to be closely monitored and regulated. They report that unlike prior versions of electronic cigarettes, smart vapes prey on three potential addictions: nicotine

dependence, gaming disorder, and screen time obsession. Talbot and Wong hope their research will encourage the Food and Drug Administration and other government agencies to regulate the sales of these devices.

"In the long-term, increasing awareness of how vapes can evolve in short periods of time can increase surveillance and monitoring to ensure products that are targeting youth are swiftly removed from the market," Talbot said. "More strict regulation can be put into place to restrict some features of vapes, and it may even be appropriate to push for a disposable vape ban altogether, as some countries have."

The researchers were surprised to learn that some smart vapes had games requiring the user to vape to progress in the games, potentially accelerating [nicotine addiction](#). For example, they found the "URSA Pocket," a refillable pod-system, has three built-in games.

"One game contains a virtual pet, which you feed with coins that you acquire by vaping; another game counts your puffs and has leaderboards, which you can submit your rankings to social media for a chance to win prizes," Wong said. "CB15K is a vape endorsed by a celebrity and offers trading cards when you purchase the device. The trading cards have a scannable QR code and the message 'scan for a chance to win.' The vape also has a display that has animations when the user puffs the device and is built in with wireless charging. These features can entice youth to purchase and use vapes."

The researchers are concerned that many of the devices are affordable, around \$15-20 each, which could entice youth to purchase them.

"This is roughly the same price as, or cheaper than, the price of PUFF BARs or ELFBARs when they dominated the market," Wong said.

"These new products, however, offer much more puffs, higher power,

and smart features for a lower price. A majority of the new disposable vapes come with many advanced functions. Regulation has not kept up with vapes at the rate they are evolving, and [youth](#) are vulnerable to these devices. In addition, disposable vapes create a lot of waste as they are one-time-use products, and adding screens, bluetooth, and digital storage to these devices exacerbates the waste generated by vapes."

**More information:** Man Wong et al, Pac-Man on a vape: electronic cigarettes that target youth as handheld multimedia and gaming devices, *Tobacco Control* (2024). [DOI: 10.1136/tc-2024-058794](https://doi.org/10.1136/tc-2024-058794)

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