

E-cigarette users often believe devices will help them quit tobacco

4 June 2015, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



They also think vapor is less harmful than secondhand smoke, survey finds.

(HealthDay)—E-cigarette users are much more hopeful that the devices will help them quit smoking than the general public is, including people who just smoke traditional tobacco cigarettes, according to a new French survey.

"Vapers" (people who use e-cigarettes) also are much less concerned about how possible toxins in e-cigarette vapors might affect them and those around them, said lead study author Dr. Sebastien Couraud, a doctor of respiratory medicine and thoracic oncology at Lyon Sud Hospital and Lyon University Cancer Institute in France.

"E-cigarette users appear to have a different view of reality, compared with everyone else," Couraud said. "Their reality is elsewhere."

Couraud presented his findings Monday at the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) annual meeting in Chicago. Findings presented at meetings are generally viewed as preliminary until they've been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Electronic cigarettes are battery-operated products designed to create an aerosol that delivers nicotine, flavor and other chemicals when inhaled by the user.

Couraud said that the public opinion his team

captured appears to mirror ongoing expert debate over whether e-cigarettes can actually help people quit smoking and whether e-cigarette vapors might contain toxic chemicals.

About 69 percent of e-cigarette users believe the devices can help a person quit tobacco smoking, compared with just 31 percent of the general population, researchers found.

Many e-cigarette users genuinely appear to want to [quit smoking](#) tobacco, Couraud said. They are more likely to be worried about dying from lung cancer than people who only smoke tobacco, he suggested. E-cigarette users are also more likely to think that using e-cigs will reduce their risk of lung cancer death, the survey revealed.

The findings from this survey highlight why regulation of e-cigarettes from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is needed as soon as possible, said ASCO spokesperson Dr. Jyoti Patel, an associate professor of hematology and oncology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

"For people who are addicted to nicotine, e-cigarettes don't help," said Patel. "They are still addicted, and they use a lot. It's not a bridge to abstinence. It's a way for them to stay addicted in a restaurant or an airplane, where they are unable to smoke."

And, indeed, users of e-cigarettes tend to be much more dependent on nicotine than traditional cigarette smokers, based on a standard test of nicotine addiction, Couraud said. About 58 percent of e-cigarette users registered as very or highly addicted, compared with 46 percent of people who only smoked tobacco.

In January, ASCO issued a call for regulation of e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems, in conjunction with the American

Association for Cancer Research, Patel noted.

For the study, Couraud and his colleagues surveyed nearly 1,500 residents of France. Ninety-three (6 percent) of those surveyed were e-cigarette users, and 74 of them also still smoked [tobacco cigarettes](#), according to the survey.

About 33 percent of e-cigarette users in the survey believed that the devices are effective in reducing deaths from [lung cancer](#), compared with 18 percent of smokers and 12 percent of the general population.

E-cigarette users also parted ways with popular opinion over whether they should worry about toxins in the vapor they inhale.

About 68 percent of current e-cigarette users in the study said that e-cig vapors are less harmful than cigarette smoke for the user, and 87 percent said the vapors pose less of a threat to those around them than secondhand cigarette smoke would.

By comparison, around 40 percent of the general French public felt that e-cigarette vapor is less harmful than cigarette smoke for the user, and about 55 percent were less concerned about e-cig vapors than [cigarette smoke](#).

"Probably they aren't completely wrong, because we know that e-cigarettes are less toxic than traditional cigarettes," Couraud said. "But there still is some toxicity, and they have a low awareness of that."

Couraud and Patel both said that American opinions of e-cigarettes likely are similar to those found in this French survey.

Dr. Gregory Masters said he completely understands conflicted public opinion over e-cigarettes.

"I do have safety concerns for e-cigarettes because nicotine is bad for you, and we don't know all of the risks with e-cigarettes," said Masters, an oncologist at the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center in Newark, Del.

"But I struggle when I get asked by patients, should I use e-cigarettes? I don't want to condone e-cigarettes as a healthy alternative, but could it be a less dangerous alternative? It could be," he added.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, [e-cigarettes](#) haven't been fully studied, so consumers don't know:

- the potential risks posed by the devices,
- how much nicotine or other potentially harmful chemicals are being inhaled,
- whether there are any benefits to be gained from the products.

More information: For more on e-cigarettes, visit the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#).

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APA citation: E-cigarette users often believe devices will help them quit tobacco (2015, June 4) retrieved 27 September 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-e-cigarette-users-devices-tobacco.html>

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