Vapor Product Research

Summary

This document was adapted with permission from the Snohomish Health District

Introduction
Vapor products, also known as e-cigarettes or electronic drug delivery devices, are battery operated inhalers containing a concentrated solution of nicotine or other drugs. The battery heats liquid in the cartridge, turning it into an aerosol that can be inhaled. The process of puffing on an e-cigarette is called “vaping.”

As the vapor product market grows, the range of products offered has expanded. These products can be generally grouped into three categories:

- Small e-cigarettes similar in appearance to traditional cigarettes. Some are sealed and disposable, others are refillable.
- Medium-sized vaping pens with refillable tanks, also known as e-hookahs, hookah pens, or vape pens.
- Large vaping devices, known as mods or personal vaporizers.

Public health concerns with the use of vapor products include:

- Potential health effects from vaping or exposure to an aerosol containing unknown mixtures of potentially harmful chemicals, especially for vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and individuals with compromised lungs.
- Rapidly increasing use of e-cigarettes and vapor devices by teens and young adults.
- Vaping other drugs in devices, including marijuana and illegal drugs.
- High poisoning risk to children from exposure to concentrated liquid nicotine or other drugs.
- “Renormalizing” of nicotine and/or tobacco products after decades of public health work

Research on e-cigarettes and vapor products is still in early stages. It took decades to discover the full health effects of tobacco use and secondhand smoke. Modern research continues to reveal new adverse health effects of tobacco use. Current challenges in vapor product research include:

- Vapor products have been used for a relatively short period of time so it is difficult to draw scientifically based conclusions on long term health effects.
- E-cigarettes and vapor products are not a standardized product, and e-liquid ingredients are unregulated and not fully disclosed. This complicates analysis of the health effects of vapor products, and may mean that research results for one type of vapor product do not apply to other types or brands.
- Controlled clinical trials and population-level cohort studies are needed to assess the use of vapor products by current smokers and nonsmokers, and impacts on smoking reduction and nicotine addiction. Early studies have yielded mixed results about the utility of e-cigarettes in reducing harm.
Vapor Product Research

Summary

This paper provides a summary of key areas of research on vaping and vapor products. Each section provides an overview as well as specific examples of research findings to support the overview. Sources of information are cited in each section.

Potentially Harmful Chemicals Identified in “E-Juice” and Vapor

The federal government does not currently regulate vapor products as it does combustible and smokeless tobacco products, therefore, manufacturers are not required to disclose the ingredients used in vapor products. Studies have found that chemical composition of vapor products vary greatly from brand to brand, and within brands. Studies of e-juice ingredients and emitted vapor have identified a range of chemicals with known toxicities, and others that have not been assessed for safety. The wide array of food flavorings used in e-juices have not been tested for safety when inhaled, and the “Generally Recognized as Safe” (or GRAS) category for food flavorings and propylene glycol does not apply to inhalation.

1. E-cigarettes contain a nicotine solution that ranges in concentration between products but can contain as much nicotine as a full pack of cigarettes. A user might take 15-30 puffs on an e-cigarette to receive the same amount of nicotine released by a conventional cigarette. Analysis of different vapor products have found disparities between the nicotine content claimed on product packaging and measured nicotine levels experienced by users.

Sources:

i. Arnold, C. 2014. “Vaping and Health: What Do We Know about E-Cigarettes?” Environmental Health Perspectives Vol. 122 (9). DOI:10.1289/ehp.122-a244/

http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/122-a244/


http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/129/19/1972


http://ntr.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2015/06/18/ntr.ntv120.abstract

2. In addition to nicotine (or other drugs), the aerosol produced by e-cigarettes and vapor products contains fine and ultrafine particles of solvents, flavorings, and chemical byproducts produced in the heating process. Chemical analysis of the vapor has identified carcinogens and toxicants that are also found in higher levels in cigarette smoke.1, ii, iv, v, viii
Chemicals found in e-cigarette vapor include:

- Propylene glycol and glycerin, used as solvents to create the vapor.\textsuperscript{ii,iv} These chemicals may cause respiratory irritation and have not been fully tested for other health effects when inhaled.\textsuperscript{ix}
- Carboxyl byproducts formed from heating propylene glycol and glycerin\textsuperscript{ii,iii} that have known toxicities\textsuperscript{ix} including:
  - Formaldehyde, a known carcinogen and respiratory irritant.
  - Acetaldehyde, a possible carcinogen.
  - Acrolein, an irritant that has not been sufficiently studied for health effects.
- Metal particles from the device casing or electronics including tin, nickel, aluminum and the highly toxic heavy metals lead, cadmium, and chromium.\textsuperscript{vi, ix}
- A wide array of food flavoring chemicals that have not been evaluated or approved as safe for inhalation (see below).\textsuperscript{ii,iv}
- At least one brand of e-cigarettes includes several forms of the chemical pyrazine, a common additive to conventional cigarettes that enhances sensory appeal and that may enhance tobacco addiction.\textsuperscript{vii}
- Carcinogens called tobacco-specific nitrosamines have been measured in many e-cigarettes containing nicotine, which is extracted from tobacco.\textsuperscript{i, ii}

\textbf{Sources:}


vii. Alpert HR, Agaku IT, Connolly GN. 2015 “A study of pyrazines in cigarettes and how additives might be used to enhance tobacco addiction” Tobacco Control. doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2014-051943. http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2015/05/03/tobaccocontrol-2014051943.full


3. Vapor products use propylene glycol and glycerin as solvents to create the vapor. These chemicals may cause respiratory irritation when inhaled, and when heated they form carbonyl byproducts that have known toxicities including formaldehyde, acetaldehyde ad acrolein.


4. The safety of flavorings used in vaping products is unclear. The Flavor & Extract Manufacturers Association of the United States (FEMA) states “E-cigarette and flavor manufacturers and marketers should not represent or suggest that the flavor ingredients used in e-cigarettes are safe because they have FEMA GRAS™ status for use in food because such statements are false and misleading.” Source: Flavor & Extract Manufacturers Association of the United States. March, 2015. “The Safety Assessment and Regulatory Authority to Use Flavors – Focus on E-Cigarettes” http://www.femaflavor.org/sites/default/files/FEMAGRAS_Ecig_March_3_2015.pdf, accessed 06/08/15.

Vapor Product Research

Summary

Nicotine: Addiction and Health Impacts
Nicotine is a highly addictive drug that has been extensively studied. Vapor products provide a new method of delivering nicotine to individuals who are already addicted, or to those who will become dependent. Nicotine exposure, firsthand or passively, can adversely impact maternal and fetal health during pregnancy, and may adversely impact adolescent brain development. High doses of nicotine, such as those in e-liquids, have acute toxicity and can be fatal if ingested or absorbed through the skin.

1. Current smokers are the most likely to try e-cigarettes and nicotine vapor products. However, about one-third (32%) of current adult users of nicotine vapor products are never or former smokers, suggesting that vapor products contribute to primary nicotine addiction.


2. Exposure to nicotine at a young age increases the number of nicotine receptors in the brain, which sets the stage for lifelong dependency and addiction. Virtually all daily smokers have smoked their first cigarette before age 26, and 90% have started before age 18.


3. People addicted to nicotine experience many triggers for the urge to smoke. A recent study found that smokers watching people vaping in commercials had an increased urge to smoke cigarettes. And former smokers who watched vaping commercials indicated they were less likely to abstain from cigarettes than nonsmokers in a control group.


4. In addition to causing addiction, nicotine activates multiple biologic pathways that are important for fetal growth and development, immune function, the cardiovascular system, the central nervous system, and carcinogenesis. Extensive research on nicotine in both human and animal studies has demonstrated adverse health effects on maternal and fetal health during pregnancy, including impaired fetal brain and lung development, preterm delivery and stillbirth.
Vapor Product Research

Summary

Sources:


5. Poisonings from liquid nicotine have been rapidly increasing since 2010 based on voluntary reporting to the Washington Poison Center. Liquid solutions containing concentrated nicotine are sold in packaging that is not child resistant and is currently unregulated at the federal and state levels.

a. Calls to the WA Poison Center on e-cigarettes and liquid nicotine increased 1000% from 2012 to 2014. Of 182 calls in 2014, 60% involved children aged 1-3. Reporting to the Washington Poison Center is voluntary, so this data is an underrepresentation of the true number of incidents.


b. The amount of nicotine in e-liquids exceeds a fatal dose for a child, and a one year-old child in New York state died after exposure.


Health Impacts of Vaping & Exposure to Secondhand Vapor

Cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals, including hundreds of known carcinogens and other toxic chemicals. Use of electronic nicotine delivery devices may be “safer” than smoking cigarettes because the inhaled toxic compounds are fewer or in lower concentrations, but current research is insufficient to quantify the reduced risk. The vapor contains many potentially harmful chemicals in addition to nicotine or other drugs (see section above), and only a few studies have directly examined the health impacts of inhaling this chemical mixture.

Some studies have found adverse biological effects of vaping. Research on the health impacts of secondhand vapor is also limited, but studies of indoor air quality are identifying concerns. Research is especially needed to understand health risks of exposure to vapor for vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant women, and individuals with pulmonary and cardiovascular conditions.
Vapor Product Research

Summary

1. A review of available peer-reviewed research on human health effects of e-cigarettes through September 2013 conducted by Dr. Callahan-Lyon of the FDA’s Center for Tobacco Products found limited data on short-term health effects and no data on long-term health effects of e-cigarette use, as well as limited data on secondhand and thirdhand exposure to vapor. The review concluded “There are not adequate data to support the safety of long-term use of electronic cigarettes at this time.”


2. A clinical study of 30 male and female smokers (aged 19-56 years and currently healthy) who used e-cigarettes for five minutes found immediate harmful effects on lung function, similar to some of the effects seen with smoking. Effects included increased lung airflow resistance, and an immediate decrease in concentration of exhaled nitric oxide which indicates oxidative stress and airway inflammation.


3. The diverse chemical flavorings—more than 7,000 varieties—used in vapor products are a significant concern as respiratory hazards. The aerosolized vapor penetrates deeply into the lungs and chemical flavorings for ingestion in food have not been evaluated for safety when inhaled. A severe obstructive lung disease has been shown to be caused by inhalation of high doses of diacetyl, a buttery flavoring used in popcorn. Analysis of sweet flavored vapor products found diacetyl in 69% of 159 products tested.

Sources:


4. E-cigarettes do not emit side-stream smoke as cigarettes do, but people near the user are exposed to exhaled vapor containing nicotine and other chemicals. Two indoor air quality studies designed to model real-world conditions where e-cigarettes are used, such as a bar or café, found elevated levels of nicotine, volatile organic compounds including carcinogens, metals, and ultrafine particulates. Levels of exposure to toxic chemicals from e-cigarettes was much lower than from conventional cigarettes;
Vapor Product Research

Summary

however, nicotine exposure was almost comparable in nonsmokers exposed secondhand to e-cigarettes and to conventional cigarettes.


5. A study of secondhand exposure to vapor in a controlled emissions chamber found an increase in levels of nicotine, ultrafine particles and volative organic chemicals from solvents and flavorings, including formaldehyde, acetone, and acetaldehyde.


6. An exposure assessment published in the journal for the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) found that vaping in a small office space could produce chemical exposure levels that increase risks of cancer and non-cancer chronic health effects for the vapor product user, as well as increased hazard for others in the office due to exposure to nicotine and propylene glycol. This analysis also found that ventilation rates in the room could not practically be improved to mitigate the health risks for all of the vapor chemicals.


Increasing Use of E-Cigarettes and Vapor Products by Youth

The use of vapor products has risen at an alarming rate every year since these products came to the U.S. market in 2007. Kids who use vapor devices to inhale nicotine or marijuana are at risk for developing a life-long dependence. Washington State law has prohibited the sales of vapor devices containing nicotine to minors under 18 since 2013. However other regulations that reduce youth access to tobacco products have not been extended to e-cigarettes and vapor products. Lack of federal and state regulation of vapor products that allow unsubstantiated safety claims, widespread advertising, unrestricted sales, and use in public places all contribute to perceptions among youth that e-cigarettes are safe to use.

1. The 2014 National Youth Tobacco Survey found that use of e-cigarettes among middle and high school students tripled from 2013 to 2014. For the first time since the survey began collecting data on e-cigarettes in 2011, current e-cigarette use also surpassed current use of every other tobacco product overall, including conventional cigarettes.
Vapor Product Research

Summary


2. The 2014 WA Healthy Youth Survey found:
   • In Washington, for 10th graders overall, 18% report they are vaping compared to 8% who are smoking.
   More Pierce County students across all grades use vapor products than use conventional cigarettes. In 2014, 12% of 8th graders, 20% of 10th graders and 23% of 12th graders reported vaping.
   In Pierce County, among students who reported using marijuana in the last 30 days, 7% of 8th graders, 5% of 10th graders and 7% of 12th graders reported vaping as the method of use.


3. More than a quarter of a million youth (263,000) who had never smoked a cigarette used electronic cigarettes in 2013, up from about 79,000 in 2011. Middle and high schoolers who had used vapor products were nearly twice as likely to have intentions to smoke conventional cigarettes than youth who had never used e-cigarettes.


4. Teens who are using e-cigarettes often are also smoking conventional cigarettes. In 2011, the CDC found that 61% of U.S. middle school students and 80% of US high school students who were vaping were also smoking.

   Source: “Notes from the Field: Electronic Cigarette Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2011–2012” MMWR September 6, 2013 / 62(35); 729-730.

Vapor Product Research

Summary

Uncertainty about Effectiveness of Vapor Products as a Substitute for Smoking or Cessation Aides

Vapor products may hold promise as a harm reduction tactic, providing a substitute for cigarettes for those who are nicotine addicted. Surveys often find individuals state they are using vapor products to quit smoking and some studies have found that e-cigarette users self-report that they have reduced their cigarette consumption. However, there is no evidence at this time from controlled longitudinal population-based research that e-cigarettes and vapor products are effective smoking cessation aides. Controlled studies are finding that e-cigarette users are actually less likely to stop smoking. In addition, former smokers may be triggered to smoke again by seeing e-cigarette use or advertising.

1. The FDA has not approved any e-cigarettes or vapor products as smoking cessation products. Smoking cessation products (e.g. nicotine patches or pharmaceuticals like Chantix or Zyban) are regulated through FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, which ensures that the products are safe and effective and that their benefits outweigh any known associated risks.

Source: FDA Smoking Cessation Products webpage.
http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm198176.htm

2. A 2014 metaanalysis of the five available population-based studies on e-cigarette use and quitting smoking found that e-cigarette use is associated with significantly lower odds of quitting smoking cigarettes.

http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/129/19/1972

3. A recent controlled study that followed 1000 California smokers using e-cigarettes for a year found they were significantly less likely to reduce their cigarette consumption and less likely to quit smoking compared to smokers who never used e-cigarettes.

http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302482

Use of THC and other drugs in vapor devices

Vapor products can be used to deliver drugs other than nicotine, and are commonly used with marijuana or THC concentrates. Some marijuana e-liquids dissolve the THC in the same chemical solvents used in nicotine e-juices, others use oils to generate vapor, and others are designed to vaporize loose leaf marijuana.
Vapor Product Research

Summary

1. Marijuana retailers in Washington State sell a variety of e-cartridges pre-loaded with THC solutions for use in vape pens and other vapor devices. Sales of THC concentrates are allowed under Washington State’s recreational marijuana law. Customers may purchase up to seven grams of marijuana extract/concentrate for inhalation.

   http://www.liq.wa.gov/marijuana/faq_rules

2. At least one company is marketing a disposable vape pen containing marijuana called JuJu Joints. The company is based in Washington State and JuJu’s are currently sold at marijuana retailers in Washington and Colorado.