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## The facts about e-cigarettes

BY LINDA CHRISTIE



Recently, there has been a lot of controversy about electronic cigarettes, more commonly known as e-cigarettes. Are they safer than cigarettes?

The product is designed to look and feel like a traditional cigarette and is powered by a battery. Cartridges are filled with a liquid form of nicotine to produce a vapor that is inhaled by the user, referred to as "vaping." There are currently more than 250 brands in a variety of colors, shapes, flavors, styles and sizes.

Where's the story?



2 Points Mentioned

The product is not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as other tobacco products are. This will change when regulations are released this year. It is expected that the regulations will focus on advertising and sale to minors, disclosure of ingredients, and consistent manufacturing standards.

Originating in [China](#), e-cigarettes appeared in the United States in late 2006. Manufacturing began with small companies, but now the product has caught the attention of Big Tobacco. Not surprisingly, they use similar strategies to promote the product as they have in the past to promote conventional cigarettes.

Advertising has exploded in the last couple of years, making production and sale of e-cigarettes a rapidly growing industry. Marketing messages promise to give smokers back their freedom, allowing them to use tobacco in public places without the stigma or smell of cigarettes and the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. Since they are not currently regulated, they can be advertised freely.

Unfortunately, we know very little about the ingredients and potential risks of e-cigarettes.

The FDA conducted lab tests in 2009 that found detectable levels of toxic cancer-causing chemicals, including an ingredient used in antifreeze. The bottom line is that e-cigarettes contain the highly addictive chemical nicotine, which is known to be more addictive than heroin or cocaine.

These facts by themselves should cause pause for thought.

One of the biggest concerns about the emerging popularity of e-cigarettes is their use among young people. One out of 10 American high school students used e-cigarettes in 2012, along with nearly 3 percent of middle school students. That's about double the rate of e-cigarette use in 2011.

Health officials feel e-cigarettes potentially pave the way to conventional cigarettes, leading to higher teen smoking rates and undoing much of the progress over the last decade in reducing youth smoking.

E-cigarettes are enticing to youth for many reasons. They emit very little odor, so it is easier to hide use from adults. New to the scene are e-hookahs or hookah pens, which are very similar to e-cigarettes and come in a variety of intense colors and flavors.

There is also great concern about the growing trend of using the e-cigarette as way to quit or cut down.





The FDA has not approved the product as a research-based tobacco cessation aid like nicotine patches and gum. Some preliminary studies have shown that it could potentially be an effective tool, but much more research needs to be done.

In summary, the e-cigarette has not been around long enough for us to know all the facts. Remember, it took years to get the truth about conventional tobacco products. Since Big Tobacco is now promoting this product, we need to take a long and hard look at e-cigarettes and the potential harm to users.

While we remain hopeful that the product will prove to be less harmful compared to conventional cigarettes, we simply don't know. In the meantime, we want to be sure that, once we know the answers, we don't have to backpedal to gain control of a product that has already infiltrated the market. Current users should be aware of the potential risks and stay abreast of the most recent research.

LINDA CHRISTIE is prevention specialist with Access Health, the local Healthy Maine Partnership, coordinated by [Mid Coast Hospital](#).

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