

Electronic Smoking Devices – Are they Safe?



What are these electronic smoking devices?

By definition smoking devices include electronic cigarettes, hookah pens, electronic cigars and personal electronic vaporizing devices (vapes) but there are likely other products and names in use.

An electronic smoking device is a battery-powered vaporizer which provides the feel of tobacco smoking. They do not produce cigarette smoke but rather an aerosol (mist), which is commonly but inaccurately referred to as vapour. A heating element atomizes a liquid solution known as e-liquid or e-juice, which is made up of a mixture of propylene glycol, glycerin, flavourings and other additives. These devices may also contain nicotine – read labels carefully. Nicotine has also been found in devices that are labeled nicotine free.

Public Health Concerns:

- Health impacts from use and/or exposure to vapour inhaled into lungs (it isn't just water vapour)
- Nicotine is a highly addictive substance with negative effects on brain development, which is undergoing change in adolescence. The availability of nicotine versions in local stores and on the internet increases the risk of youth becoming addicted to nicotine. They may also act as a gateway to conventional cigarette use by exposing youth to nicotine and making smoking seem more acceptable.
- These products and their nicotine cartridges should be kept out of reach of children at all times, given the risk of nicotine poisoning, especially to children and youth. Calls to the US Centre for Poison Control have risen exponentially since 2010, from an average of one call a month to 215 calls a month in 2014. Most of these calls were about poisoning in children under age four.
- There is no information about their safety for use by pregnant or breastfeeding women.

Laws and Policies on Electronic Smoking Devices

There is no regulation on the sale or marketing to youth of these devices. There are no federal or provincial restrictions on where they can be used.

Electronic smoking devices are prohibited on all Interior Health properties.

Interior Health Medical Health Officers have recommended that School Districts ban their use on smoke free school properties. This recommendation is currently under review by SD8 Policy Committee and SD8 should soon have a Smoke Free Policy that includes Electronic smoking devices.

The Canadian Medical Association recommends a ban on the sale of all electronic smoking devices to Canadians younger than the minimum age for tobacco sales in their province (age 19 in BC).

Health Canada advises Canadians not to purchase or use electronic smoking products as these products may pose health risks and have not been fully evaluated for safety, quality and efficacy by Health Canada. Despite this advisory, these products are readily available online or in stores.

Advice to Parents and Staff

Talk to youth about these devices. Youth may think they are harmless but the evidence raises concerns. Tobacco companies heavily market these devices with hundreds of flavours to entice youth to buy their products. 80% of smokers start before the age of 18. 50% of teens who smoke will do so for 16-20 years.

Ref: BC Medical Journal (October 2014), Electronic Cigarettes: Do we know the benefits vs the risks?