

Let's
Talk
About...

Electronic Smoking Products and Safety

You may be hearing a lot about electronic smoking products (ESPs) lately, which are also called electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), electronic cigarettes, e-cigarettes or vaping pens.

Because ESPs have not been fully tested for safety, quality and effectiveness, Health Canada warns Canadians not to purchase or use these products. Alberta Health Services supports Health Canada's position and warnings.

Whether or not you choose to use them, you should know that there are safety issues to think about, especially if you have children.

Safety Concerns

There are no standards or labelling requirements for e-cigarettes. This includes no control over the packaging and marketing of these products, which makes it hard to know exactly what's in the liquid. Common contents include a mix of water and propylene glycol, a man-made product used in antifreeze and theatre fog.

In Canada, it's illegal to sell ESPs containing nicotine. However, tests of some ESPs labeled as nicotine-free have found nicotine in them. People

may buy them from other countries where the regulations are different, and can also choose to add nicotine to the product after they buy them.

Because chemicals in the cartridges can vary, it's hard to know what e-cigarette users and people nearby are breathing in. Parents and caregivers may have a false sense of security believing these products are nicotine-free or harmless.

The vapour from e-cigarettes is also a potential concern. Many companies that sell ESPs claim that the vapour is just water; however, tests on these products have shown they can contain toxic chemicals which may irritate the lungs and/or make asthma worse. These toxins can also increase the risks of inflammation and constriction in the lungs and airways. More research needs to be done to understand the impact of being exposed to these chemicals over time.


Many of these products contain tempting flavours (such as candy or fruit), which can make kids want to taste them. Health Canada warns that e-cigarettes may cause nicotine poisoning. Electronic smoking products, even those labeled nicotine free, should be stored and disposed of like poison. Nicotine is poisonous and is easily absorbed if swallowed or spilled on the skin. Even a small amount of e-liquid can be harmful, or even fatal, to a young child.

Health Canada advises that these products and the cartridges be kept out of reach of children. In Alberta, calls about e-cigarettes to poison control centres appear to be rising.



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If liquid comes in contact with skin or is swallowed, contact the Poison and Drug Information Service (PADIS) toll-free at 1-800-332-1414 for advice and referral. It is recommended that electronic products and cartridges be kept out of the reach of children to prevent potential choking incidents or nicotine poisoning.

Along with the health hazards of ESPs, fires and explosions have been reported. It's important not to leave the product unattended while charging, not to charge it while a vehicle is moving, and to use only the charging system approved for the product.

Gateway to Addiction

Nicotine is a powerful and highly addictive drug. People may try these products believing they are nicotine-free or harmless—they don't expect to develop an addiction to nicotine. This is especially a concern for teens who would otherwise choose to be tobacco-free. Teens that become addicted to the nicotine may move on to using traditional tobacco products.

We know that children learn behaviours from the adults in their life. When kids have family members or friends who use tobacco, they have a much higher risk of using themselves. Although research in this area for ESP use is needed, being open to talking about the harms of these products with children can make all the difference. Listen to what your child has to say and ask them about the challenges they may be facing. The pressures kids face to try tobacco and tobacco-like products continues from youth to adulthood, so you may have this conversation many times.

What About Quitting?

We don't have enough evidence about the potential benefits of using an ESP for smoking cessation. More research is needed.

If you're thinking about using an ESP to help you quit smoking, think about using an approved nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) option instead. There are several over-the-counter NRTs and prescription medications that have been clinically tested and approved by Health Canada to assist tobacco users to reduce or quit, such as the gum, lozenge, inhaler, spray and patch. There is other medicine available as well. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about what's best for you.

The proper use of NRTs, combined with getting support from a trained health professional, will double your chances of success.

Quitting is possible. For information and support, contact AlbertaQuits at 1-866-710-QUIT (7848) or visit albertaquits.ca.



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