

# ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES & VAPES

Have you seen someone using an electronic cigarette? What do you know about them? How they work? Their effects? Their harms?

## WHAT ARE THEY?

Electronic cigarettes, e-cigarettes or e-cigs are battery powered devices which heat liquid (called e-liquid) into an aerosol which is inhaled into a person's lungs (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). "E-liquids are often flavoured, with over 7,000 flavours available such as tobacco, confectionery, fruit and chocolate" (Zhu et al., 2014). The aerosol can be called 'vapour' and smoking e-cigarettes is often referred to as 'vaping'. Some e-cigarettes look like conventional cigarettes, cigars or pipes. Others look like everyday items such as pens or USB memory sticks.

Some e-cigarettes contain nicotine which is the chemical compound found in tobacco. Unlike cigarettes and other tobacco products, e-cigarettes don't contain dried tobacco leaves; users inhale liquid nicotine and other chemicals in a vapour form, created by heat, rather than inhaling smoke. When e-cigarettes are used, the user inhales and exhales the vapour which may give the appearance of smoke. The nicotine solution and other chemicals in the e-cigarettes are contained in a disposable cartridge that can be replaced or refilled.

Because e-liquids used in e-cigarettes are unregulated and e-cigarettes and e-liquids are often not accurately labelled, it's hard to know exactly how much nicotine you are inhaling. Additionally, some e-liquids that don't list nicotine on the label have been found, after scientific testing, to contain nicotine (NSW Health, n.d.; Brown and Cheng, 2014). Unregulated e-liquids and incorrect labelling can contribute to increasing a user's risk of harm.

## ARE E-CIGARETTES SAFER THAN CIGARETTES AND TRADITIONAL TOBACCO PRODUCTS?

1. Whilst e-cigarettes contain chemicals that may be acceptable for use in foods and cosmetics, there is uncertainty about whether the vapours inhaled into the lungs are actually safe. Although e-cigarettes are relatively new to the market, early research by

Cancer Council Australia seems to suggest that long-term inhalation of these chemicals directly into the lungs is likely to cause health harms (Cancer Council, 2017).

2. WHO has warned that any level of exposure to particles found in e-cigarettes by the user or bystander (passive smoker) may be harmful and should be minimised, especially for those with existing chronic disease. Exposure to heavy metals such as nickel and silver may even be greater than in conventional cigarettes.
3. There is very little available research that indicates if e-cigarettes can help people quit smoking. Some users may use both cigarettes and e-cigarettes which may increase their chance of harm.
4. A number of cases have been reported in the US and UK of e-cigarettes overheating, catching fire or exploding. This can cause serious and in some cases life threatening injury, disability and disfigurement.

## WHAT'S THE LAW SAY?

In WA the use of e-cigarettes fits under the *Tobacco Products Control Act 2006* and the *Medicines and Poisons Act 2014*.

These Acts state that:

- it's an offence under the Tobacco Products Control Act 2006 to sell products that resemble tobacco products, regardless of whether they contain nicotine or not
- e-cigarette products that contain liquid nicotine are illegal to sell or possess
- e-cigarette products that don't contain liquid nicotine but make a therapeutic claim are legal to possess but not to sell without Therapeutic Goods Australia approval
- owners/managers may choose to implement a policy applying to their premises which prohibits the use of e-cigarettes wherever smoking is prohibited. (Palmer & Hogan, 2017)



## REFERENCES

So, what are our top three messages about e-cigarettes?

1. The jury is out on whether e-cigarettes are more harmful than traditional ways of smoking tobacco and whether they can assist people to quit smoking.
2. Health risks from e-cigarettes differ from various brands and types. There is inconsistency in products and inaccuracy in the labelling of e-cigarettes.
3. In WA, it's an offence to sell e-cigarette products that resemble tobacco products, regardless of whether they contain nicotine or not.

Brown, C. J., & Cheng, J. M. (2014). Electronic cigarettes: product characterisation and design considerations. *Tob Control*, 23 Suppl. 2: pp. 4-10.

Cancer Council Australia. (2017). E-cigarettes. Retrieved from <https://www.cancer.org.au/preventing-cancer/smoking-and-tobacco/e-cigarettes.html>

NSW Health (n.d.) *Fact Sheet: Are electronic cigarettes and e-liquids safe?* Retrieved from <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/tobacco/Factsheets/e-cigs-are-they-safe.pdf>

Palmer, S., & Hogan, J. (2017). Clearing the air on e-cigarettes. Factors regarding regulation that require consideration. Western Australia. Parliament. Legislative Assembly. Committees. Education and Health Standing Committee. Report 1. Retrieved from [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/C2694C3D9AFD9CC84825814E0008DEF2/\\$file/20170626%20E-cigarettes%20report%20-%20FINAL%20\(with%20final%20cover\).pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/C2694C3D9AFD9CC84825814E0008DEF2/$file/20170626%20E-cigarettes%20report%20-%20FINAL%20(with%20final%20cover).pdf)

World Health Organization. (2017). *Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Electronic Non-Nicotine Delivery Systems*. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/statements/electronic-cigarettes-january-2017/en/>

Zhu, S., Sun, J., Bonnevie, E. Cummins, S., Gamst, A, Yin, L., & Lee, M. (2014). Four hundred and sixty brands of e-cigarettes and counting: implications for product regulation. *Tob Control*, 23 Suppl. 3: pp. 3-9.



### NEED HELP?

If you or anyone you know is experiencing a drug use issue, contact WA's 24hr Drug and Alcohol Support Line.

- Metro (08) 9442 5000
- Country 1800 198 024
- Emergency 000

Live chat with a qualified and experienced drug counsellor is also offered at: <http://drugaware.com.au>