

poison prevention press

E-cigarette Use in Tweens and Teens

According to the National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), e-cigarette use doubled in middle and high school students during 2011-2012. This means that about 1.78 million students have ever used e-cigarettes as of 2012. About 160,000 students who reported using e-cigarettes had never used tobacco cigarettes. These statistics are alarming because nicotine has a negative effect on brain development in this age group. In addition, there is a risk the students will become addicted to nicotine. This can possibly lead to the use of tobacco products. (MMWR, 9/6/2013)

Did you know that...

- As of October 1, 2012, it is illegal to sell e-cigarettes to minors?

- In 2011, there were over 7,000 calls to poison centers in the U.S. about nicotine-containing product exposures in children less than 6 years old?

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Electronic Cigarettes and Nicotine

According to a survey done by the CDC, in 2010 about 10% of smokers had used an electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) at least once. When the survey was repeated in 2011 the number increased to 21%. Some smokers are turning to e-cigarettes as a means of smoking in public. Others feel e-cigarettes are safer than regular cigarettes. However, there are no health studies to support this. But what is an e-cigarette?



An e-cigarette is a device that looks like a cigarette, but it does not burn tobacco. Instead, the battery operated device uses a heating element to vaporize a liquid solution. The vapor is then inhaled in the same way as smoke is inhaled from a cigarette. The liquid may or may not contain nicotine. Many of the liquids, also called "smoke juice", come in flavors like fruit punch, strawberry, chocolate, mint, menthol, cola, cherry and many more. The liquid is placed on a fiber filler inside the device. The liquid comes in different size bottles and can be ordered in different nicotine strengths. Because the liquids are concentrated, even a small taste in a young child can lead to symptoms.

The symptoms of nicotine toxicity vary based on the amount of nicotine that is swallowed. Mild symptoms include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- dizziness
- drowsiness
- increased heart rate
- increased blood pressure

More severe symptoms seen when larger amount of nicotine are ingested include:

- seizures
- decreased heart rate
- decreased blood pressure

Tobacco-containing products like cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco and pipe tobacco put children at risk for nicotine poisoning. Small children will find cigarettes on coffee tables and may nibble at them. They may also pick up cigarette butts out of an ashtray and eat them. Although there is minimal tobacco left on a cigarette or cigar butt, they do contain nicotine because the burning tobacco smoke is drawn through them. Children can be exposed to nicotine if they drink the spit juice from a soda can or bottle that someone is using while chewing tobacco.

Products that help people stop smoking like nicotine patches, gum and lozenges are also dangerous for children. The gum and lozenges look like chewing gum and mints so children can be easily confused. Children may also find used nicotine patches in the trash and put them on their skin, mistaking them for stickers. There have even been cases in which children have been found chewing on nicotine patches. Like the e-cigarette liquid, these products contain a concentrated amount of nicotine. Extreme care should be taken when using these products if young children are around.

If someone has ingested any of the above nicotine-containing products, the poison center should be called right away. Do not wait for symptoms to develop. The pharmacists and nurses answering your call will be able to determine if the amount eaten is a problem. They will then provide treatment advice based on the information given. The poison experts are available 24/7/365 by calling 1-800-222-1222.