

WHY E-CIGARETTES SHOULD BE MORE REGULATED AND HOW TO DO IT

Jacopo Trapletti
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What are E-Cigarettes?

Quoting Lempert e-cigarettes are: “devices that deliver an aerosol by heating a solution typically composed of propylene glycol and/or glycerol (glycerin), nicotine and flavoring agents”.¹ E-cigarettes come in different shapes, sizes and designs (Figure 1).



Figure 1
Source: NIDA, E-cigs Factsheet

What are the issues?

The study of the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) confirms that e-cigarettes are still a **product as harmful as tobacco**.⁴ In particular, e-cigs deliver nicotine, a highly addictive substance, which can damage the brain development, especially during adolescence. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) discovered that the aerosols from e-cigarettes contain other toxic chemicals and the long term use of this type of inhalation can cause breathing problems.⁵ Moreover, Primack, in his study, found out a common trend: **a person who smokes e-cigs is “four time more likely” to start smoking “real” cigarettes**.⁶ However, smokers, especially teenagers, don't perceive e-cigarettes as harmful.¹¹ This misconception is favored by the current regulation of e-cigs use, that is permissive and ambiguous, especially in regard to marketing and use restrictions.²

Trends

E-cigarettes firstly appeared in the US in 2006. Since then the market size has grown impressively, taking advantage of the lack of a clear and uniform federal regulatory strategy. In 2015 its value was around \$3,25 billion with a predicted sales of \$2,5 billion (Figure 2).²

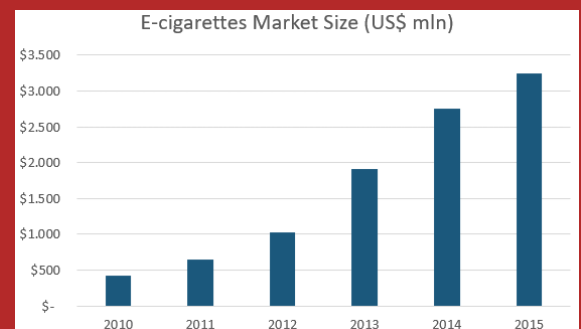


Figure 2
Data Source: PHLC
Original Infographic

This increase was followed by a growth in e-cigarettes use among US teenagers. **In 2018, 1 every 5 high school student smoked e-cigs.**³ The upward trend can be seen in Figure 3, which shows the percentage of students using tobacco and e-cig products from 2011 to 2018.

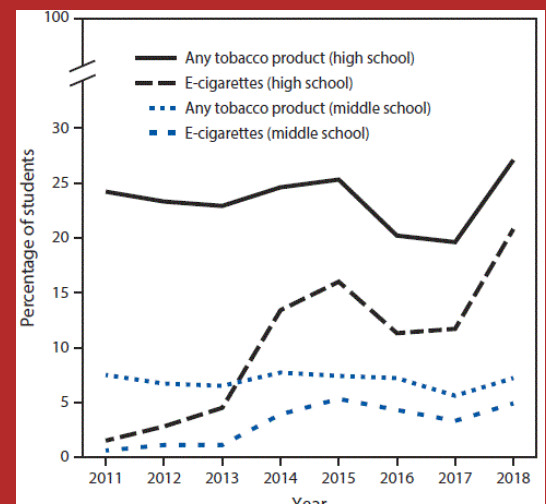
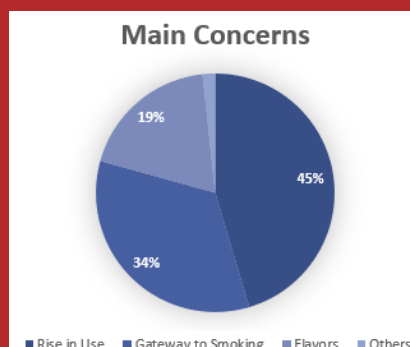
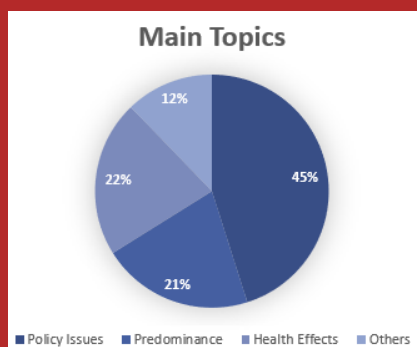


Figure 3, Source: K. Cullen et al, MMWR

Media's Reaction and Public Opinion

Because of their influence on public opinion, news media may greatly help to eradicate the misconceptions about e-cigarettes. In fact, a recent study reports that the main topics of wide interest debated by the media are: e-cigarette **policy/regulatory issues** (45,1%), e-cigarette **predominance** (21,0%) and **health effects** (21,7%).⁷ Furthermore, focusing on the e-cig epidemic among young people the main concerns brought up by media are: the **rise in e-cigarette use** (45,4%), its potential **gateway to smoking** (33,9%) and its **appeal of flavors** (19,0%).⁷



Figures 4 and 5
Data Source: Wackowski et al, NTR.
Original Infographic

Why Focusing On Marketing and Use Restrictions?

Marketing and use are the most important issues in e-cigarettes regulation that should be improved.

Regarding marketing: the boost in the use of e-cigs among teens is strictly connected to their **exposure to e-cigarettes advertisement campaigns**. Teens are attracted by ads that induce them to perceive e-cigarettes as "cooler, more fun, healthier, and more enjoyable" than cigarettes.² Currently there are no defined rules about misleading product claims and the advertisements of e-cigarettes, which allows e-cigs companies to target young people as the most profitable consumers. Regarding use limitations: many existing smoke-free laws **do not restrict the use of the e-cigarettes in indoor public places**, since these products emit an aerosol instead of secondhand smoke.

Implementing this type of rules may be a stimulus to quit smoking as it is for regular cigarettes smokers. It may also diminish or even prevent the imitation effect, potent above among adolescents.

Current Regulation⁸

In 2016, the US Food and Drug Administrations (FDA) issued a decisive rule deeming e-cigarettes within their authority.

The main points of this new regulation are:

- Inclusion of e-cigarettes containing nicotine as tobacco products for certain purposes.
- Imposition of the minimum legal sale age at 18.
- Required submission of ingredients, listing and reporting Harmful and Potentially Harmful Constituents.
- Requirements of premarket review and warning labels.

NEXT STEPS

Knowing that marketing and use are the most important and controversial aspects about e-cigarettes that need to be regulated, and taking into consideration that the e-cigarettes market is a branch which is constantly evolving and changing, the next step that the federal government should take is **to implement new laws custom-made for e-cigarettes**.⁹

Some possible suggestions are:

- Introducing **control on misleading product claims** about e-cigarettes, and prevent e-cigarettes dealers from targeting minors as main consumers through the use of advertising that emphasizes sex appeal, individualism and overall coolness.
- **Banning e-cigs advertisement** from tv and especially social media.
- Implementing **restrictions for the use of e-cigarettes in indoor public spaces**, as it is for the use of regular cigarettes and all the others main tobacco products.
- Supporting **campaigns of correct information** on the effective consequences of the e-cig.use in collaboration with the Health System and the Educational System.¹⁰

How will these initiatives help?

It appears clear that definite restrictive regulations in the use of e-cigs and less appealing marketing campaigns will **obscure the presence of these devices in public spaces**, thus **reducing the curiosity of non-users of all ages and the imitation effect** that is spontaneous above all among adolescents. These consequences are supported by Farrelly's study which connects antismoking campaigns targeted at youth to "substantial declines in youth smoking": the first antismoking campaign direct to youth resulted in a decline of 22% in use among students.¹⁰

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