



E-cigarettes: advice for the dental team

Patients are asking about e-cigarettes. This briefing, based on an article in the British Dental Journal, describes e-cigarettes, suggests advice for the dental team to give patients about e-cigarettes and lists the questions to consider when deciding whether to permit or prohibit e-cigarette use on dental premises.¹

What is an e-cigarette?

E-cigarettes are electronic devices designed to vaporise a nicotine containing liquid which is then inhaled and, when exhaled, may produce a white vapour. They are not a tobacco product and their use, often called vaping, is not smoking. The basic components of an e-cigarette are the cartridge or tank containing the liquid, the battery and the atomiser, which heats and vaporises the liquid. There are a wide range of e-cigarette products, three types of which can be seen below (Figure 1). The e-cigarette liquids may contain nicotine in various concentrations, propylene glycol and/or glycerol, water, citric acid and a wide variety of flavourings eg tobacco, chocolate, fruit, margarita.

What are current regulations?

E-cigarettes are currently regulated as general consumer products. E-cigarettes may be used anywhere except where organisations restrict their use. Regulations are currently being developed in England to prohibit the sale of

e-cigarettes to people aged under 18. They are planned to come under the European Tobacco Products Directive from 2016, at which time print and broadcast advertising will be prohibited, packaging will carry health warnings and contents will need to be declared.

E-cigarettes and health

As e-cigarettes are a recent innovation, there are no reliable long-term studies of their health impacts. The safety and quality of existing unlicensed products are highly variable. However while the vapour from e-cigarettes has been found to contain toxic substances, available evidence indicates that they are significantly less harmful than smoked tobacco.

Figure 1 Three types of e-cigarettes



Disposable e-cigarette; reusable e-cigarette with prefilled replaceable cartridge and USB charger; refillable cartridge/tank e-cigarette. Photo:PSP Worsley

E-cigarettes as smoking cessation aids

E-cigarettes are increasingly being used by smokers and ex-smokers to reduce the amount of tobacco they smoke, to quit smoking and to maintain abstinence from tobacco use. Research is showing that e-cigarettes may be as effective as licensed nicotine replacement therapies (NRT), but as yet no e-cigarettes are licensed as medicinal products and therefore cannot be recommended as a NRT. Some e-cigarette manufacturers are currently applying for medicinal licences for their products.

What do the dental team tell patients about e-cigarettes?

Dental teams have an important role to play in advising patients to stop smoking.² Currently, the use of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation tool is not supported, however patients may be using them and asking the dental team about e-cigarettes, so what do we tell them? Current suggested advice for patients about e-cigarettes is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Advice about e-cigarettes for patients (October 2014)

The long term safety of e-cigarettes is not yet established.

E-cigarettes are significantly less harmful than tobacco cigarettes.

Early evidence indicates that e-cigarettes may be effective in helping smokers to quit, however the safety, quality and effectiveness of unlicensed medical products cannot be assured. Smokers may choose to use e-cigarettes in combination with licensed medicines.

As yet no e-cigarettes are licensed as medicines and patients should be advised to use licensed NRT products to quit or reduce tobacco consumption.

Advice to patients who are unable or unwilling to use licensed NRT products is that although the safety of e-cigarettes is

not yet assured, they are a lower risk option than continuing to smoke.

Advise patients that there is the potential for advice about e-cigarettes to change as findings from research about the safety and effectiveness of e-cigarettes is published.

Advise patients that referral to Stop Smoking Services is an option to consider.

Do you permit or prohibit e-cigarette use on your dental premises?

To help establish a justifiable policy about whether to permit or ban e-cigarette use on premises a guidance sheet with five questions for consideration has been drawn up by ASH and others to help inform that decision (Table 2).³

Table 2. Questions to ask when deciding to permit or prohibit e-cigarette use

What are the issues you are dealing with? Maintaining compliance with smokefree legislation, promoting good role models for children, projecting a clean and healthy image for your premises.

What do you need to control? Lookalikes, nicotine, vapour.

Do you have concerns about the possibility of harm from nicotine containing products?

Will restricting or prohibiting the use of nicotine containing products support compliance with smokefree policies?

Do you want your policy to improve people's health?

Keeping up to date

E-cigarettes are increasingly being used and their use will impact on the advice we give patients, therefore it is important to keep abreast of this rapidly developing market. Information in this advice sheet represents the position at October 2014.

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Further reading

¹[Worsley DJ, Jones K, Marshman Z. \(2014\) Patients are asking about e-cigarettes. What do we tell them? *BDJ*, 217, 91-95](#)

²[Public Health England \(2014\) Smokefree and smiling](#)

³[ASH \(2014\) Will you permit or prohibit e-cigarette use on your premises?](#)

[NCST - National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training \[www.ncst.co.uk\]\(http://www.ncst.co.uk\)](#)

[NCST Electronic cigarette briefing paper](#)