EUPHA is concerned about the rapid and uncontrolled uptake in 'vaping' and EUPHA calls for robust scientific evidence to assess both potential risks and benefits of e-cigs.

What is it?

Electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigarettes, e-cigs or, most accurately, Electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), are tools that deliver an aerosol (called 'vapor'), inhaled by the users and originated through the heating of a solution, usually composed of propylene glycol or glycerol (glycerin) and flavorings, with or without nicotine.

ENDS are being heavily marketed in some countries in recent last years. In 2012, about 7% of the European population have tried e-cigs at least once in their life.

The WHO document on e-cigs

In 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) noted that, while e-cigarettes represent an "evolving frontier filled with promise and threat for tobacco control," ENDS regulation should:

- Impede e-cigarette promotion to non-smokers and young people;
- Minimize potential health risks to e-cigarette users and nonusers;
- Prohibit unproven health claims about e-cigarettes;

In particular, WHO urges regulating:

- Advertising, with an appropriate government body restricting e-cigarette advertising, promotion and sponsorship, to ensure that it does not target youth and non-smokers or people who do not currently use nicotine.
- Indoor use, with a ban of the use of e-cigarettes indoors in public and work places.

The legislative situation in Europe

The EU member states have adopted different regulations for ENDS. Some countries have prohibited the sale, while other countries have regulated them as tobacco products, as medical devices, or as consumer products.

The European Union in 2014 adopted the new EU Tobacco Products Directive that includes regulations for ENDS. The directive states that their packaging should provide information on toxicity and addictiveness, health warnings, and a list of all the substances contained in the product, including the exact level of nicotine (that should be in a concentration level of no more than 20 mg/mL). The Directive also requires that advertising and promotion rules for tobacco products also apply to electronic cigarettes.

"e-cigarettes may turn out to be effective in increasing quitting but that has yet to be shown. However, if this is shown to be the case, then just like any other system delivering an active, and potentially toxic substance, they must be subject to appropriate regulation."

Martin McKee, EUPHA president

Key-questions about e-cigs

Are e-cigs safe?

- The limited existing data report some adverse effects related to the use of ENDS, such as mouth and throat irritation, nausea, headache and dry cough. The effects of using them over many years have not yet been studied, due to their relatively recent entry into the market. However, there is growing concern about a variety of risks, although at a lower level than traditional cigarettes. Some relate to nicotine, with growing concerns about its cancer promoting properties, and others to the many flavourings that have never been tested for safety when inhaled, while new research has raised concerns about high levels of formaldehyde, a known carcinogen, produced by combustion of the solvents used.
- The level of nicotine and other components released vary greatly among products, even at equal levels of nicotine in the refill liquid, due to the considerable differences among the different types and brands of e-cigs.

Are e-cigs effective in helping to quit smoking?

- A recent Cochrane Review reported that the quality of the existing evidence was low. It is not clear whether ENDS are any more effective that traditional nicotine replacement therapy. It will be important to ascertain whether they are effective in quitting, rather than just cutting down, given that the risk of heart disease remains in those smoking only a few cigarettes each day.

Do e-cigs bring non-smokers to tobacco consumption (gateway effect)?

- The evidence from different countries is conflicting but some studies reported an increased use of electronic cigarettes among young people, which may or may not be substituting for cigarettes. Among adults, the pattern of dual use seems also the predominant one. At the moment there are limited and controversial data regarding the evolution of the smoking epidemic after the rise in popularity of e-cigs.

EUPHA — EUROPEAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

REMAINS COMMITTED

"…electronic nicotine delivery devices should be restricted or banned until more information about their safety is available. If they are allowed, they should be closely regulated as medicines or tobacco products."

Forum of International Respiratory Societies

"… supports the rigorous approach of the WHO concerning electronic cigarettes, hoping that only scientific evidences lead to a Public Health approach aimed at the prevention of the initiation…, at the protection of non-smokers …, at the regulation of advertising"

Italian National Institute of Health

EUPHA is concerned that the recent publicity given to these devices may divert attention from much more effective measures to reduce smoking such as standardised packaging and price rises.

EUPHA

"It is encouraging that the WHO shares our concerns surrounding e-cigarettes and has joined us in calling for stronger regulation… Tighter controls are needed to ensure their use does not undermine current tobacco control measures and reinforces the normalcy of smoking behavior."

British Medical Association

"What we really need is for electronic cigarettes to be subject to the same controls as tobacco, and e-cigarettes to be treated as a tobacco product, so they cannot be marketed or advertised."

UK Faculty of Public Health