TEENS WHO USE E-CIGARETTES ARE MORE LIKELY TO START SMOKING CIGARETTES SHOWS UH CANCER CENTER STUDY

The new study examined e-cigarette behaviors among Hawai’i high school students

HONOLULU – Teenagers who use e-cigarettes are more likely to start smoking tobacco cigarettes, a new study by University of Hawai’i Cancer Center researchers has found. Adolescents who have never smoked cigarettes, but are using e-cigarettes, are more likely to become cigarette smokers 1 year later.

"Teenage use of electronic cigarettes is an emerging public health issue. There is still a significant amount of debate around how e-cigs are relevant for someone's health," said Dr. Thomas Wills, PhD, the interim director of the UH Cancer Center's Prevention and Control Program.

In the last four years there has been a dramatic increase in e-cigarette use by teenagers. Rates of high school students' use of e-cigs have gone from 1-2% of students to rates now showing 20-30%, according to Dr. Wills.

"For several years people have asked if e-cigarettes make young people more inclined to smoke, whether there’s no effect, or if it does the opposite and helps teens who are smoking to quit," said Dr. Wills. "However, there has been little knowledge about what this means for health-related behaviors, and almost no scientific evidence for an answer to this question until recently."
The findings by Dr. Wills and collaborators published in Tobacco Control, provide evidence that e-cigarettes are serving as a risk for teens to begin smoking tobacco cigarettes. The data, collected since 2012, are based on school surveys of more than 2,300 high school students in Hawai‘i, mostly 9th and 10th graders.

"The findings of the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center study confirm the importance of protecting our youth from initiating e-cigarette use," said Lila Johnson, Program Manager for the Department of Health's Tobacco Prevention and Education Program. "It also provides further evidence for the inclusion of e-cigarettes in Hawaii's clean air laws, and for restricting the sale of tobacco products (including e-cigarettes) to those under age 21."

Results showed that Native Hawaiian and Filipino teens were more likely to start using e-cigarettes, compared with Asian-Americans (Japanese, Chinese or Koreans). The study also found that adolescents who perceived higher levels of emotional support and understanding from parents were less likely to start using e-cigarettes, and this was true for all ethnic groups.

"Research from Hawai‘i is making a national impact. The findings are being included in the scientific database used by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as they consider Federal regulation of tobacco products including e-cigarettes," Dr. Wills pointed out.

"For teens the findings mean that they cannot assume that e-cigarettes are harmless. Using e-cigarettes increases the likelihood of starting to smoke cigarettes, which are not good for you. For parents, you can't assume that it doesn't matter whether kids use e-cigarettes. It does matter."

The University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center is one of 69 research institutions designated by the National Cancer Institute. Affiliated with the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, the center is dedicated to eliminating cancer through research, education, and improved patient care. Learn more at www.uhcancercenter.org. Like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/UHCancerCenter. Follow us on Twitter @UHCancerCenter.