



A Public Health Blog

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Bad habits gone hi-tech and hi-tech creating bad habits

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Have you seen anyone vaping in public lately? Yes, that's right "vaping". Vaping is using a battery powered device called an electronic cigarette, or "e-cigarette". It contains a liquid filled cartridge and a heating coil that creates a vapour that is exhaled and looks like smoke but isn't.

The marketing world of electronic cigarettes has exploded with so many parts, accessories, styles, and varieties that it needs its own glossary of terms. The liquid or "e-juice" comes in a variety of flavours, with some mixtures claiming to be in "herbal" form. Some have LED screens and fancy push buttons. There are starter kits and personal vapourizers. Some are rechargeable, some are disposable. There are e-cigars, small compact ones for quick fixes or for people "on the go", and on and on. They are also available just about everywhere to anyone.

The cigarette has gone high tech.

Although e-cigarettes are not supposed to be sold as a health product like other smoking cessation products (the nicotine patch or the gum for example), many people are using them as an alternative to the well-known deadly and toxic tobacco product that has claimed the health and the lives of far too many. For some people, vaping is helping them butt out. There is no real evidence to suggest that this is an effective way of quitting despite individual claims at this point. The fact that it is cheaper than regular cigarettes may also be appealing.

So what is the concern?

From a Public Health perspective, we want to know what the risk is to people's health.

We don't know exactly what chemicals are in the various mixtures of e-juice nor what amounts can be harmful to the body and how. Nicotine is a very dangerous and addicting substance, therefore e-cigarettes containing nicotine are also not supposed to be sold in Canada, however they are not hard to find. Almost anything is available over the internet. Some of the e-juices come from countries across the

world without a good understanding of what chemical ingredients they contain. The liquids may or may not contain nicotine but without any regulations for product testing and labelling, it makes it very hard to know which ones do and which ones don't. The e-juice is actually a heating solution that is chemically made up of propylene glycol, flavouring agents and other unknown chemicals. The liquids are prepared in a variety of flavours to catch people's cravings; even candy and fruit flavours that would be appealing to kids.

There has been a significant increase in the use of e-cigarettes in Canada in the past few years, including youth who may even be non-smokers. Is this a gateway that will lead to increased smoking rates? This is a big concern! The act of inhaling and exhaling on a chemical filled product is not an image that we want children to see and interpret as "the thing to do". Marketing experts in the tobacco industry have already produced flavoured tobacco cigarettes that kids and youth are using.

People believe it is ok to vape in public because it is odourless and "smokeless", therefore more socially acceptable. In most areas, there are no regulations to prohibit the use of these products in public places. Parents are using them around their children both in the home and in vehicles with a sense of new found freedom. Travelers are vaping in planes and airports and teenagers are vaping as they walk through malls.

Meanwhile the red lights and flashing danger signs are going off for us in Public Health. We are concerned about the health of our population and we don't like anything that may be a threat. You see, we have come such a long way. Public education, health policy and regulations on the sale of tobacco products to minors and legislations such as the Smoke Free Places Act have been very effective in creating healthier environments for Canadians. When it comes to children, health protection is a must. Reducing their exposure to the dangers of second hand smoke is a major milestone. Just like having laws that prevent people from smoking in vehicles with children present, and lowering the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome as it relates to smoking.

Can you imagine sitting beside someone who is smoking on an airplane? Or in your office space? How about your dentist lighting a smoke as he freezes your mouth to fill a cavity? Or imagine a group of pregnant women at a neighbourhood park sharing parenting stories in a cloud of smoke while their toddlers sat on their laps? This was common! It seems unbelievable now, but it used to happen ...this used to be the norm and not that long ago! If we only knew then what we know now.

We didn't know any better. It takes time and research, education and awareness to initiate the changes necessary to protect health. E-cigarettes are fairly new, and we don't yet have the evidence to prove



they're safe.

That is why we need to be cautious.

Currently, our Chief Medical Officer of Health along with her colleagues across Canada, are considering a variety of information on this topic including individual claims of success for smoking cessation with a view to coming up with the best advice regarding regulations and legislation dealing with e-cigarettes. This is

for the sake of public health. There is a lot of work happening to understand the potential risks and benefits on this issue.

There's no question about it: we live in a high tech world and we benefit from technology. Having a wealth of knowledge with the click of a button, and connecting with others across the world in new and wonderful ways proves that technology is an amazing and wonderful thing. As a result, we have new desires and expectations to have various technologies as part of our day to day lives.

However, we can't forget about other important issues such as our health. Should we not question and take time to wonder how our health may have been sacrificed with the advancement of technology? The hours we spend on social media rather than taking a brisk walk in nature with a friend should make us wonder. Think of how many accidental deaths and injuries are caused by texting and driving. Not to mention the many links that have been made between sedentary lifestyles from too much screen time and the risk of developing chronic diseases like childhood obesity and diabetes.

Our behaviours determine our health and so does our drive to satisfy our desires. Like anything, there needs to be a balance in our lives in order for us to reach a level of good health.

When bad habits like smoking are going high tech, we must be careful. We must also consider the question "is high tech creating bad habits"? Truly something to think about!

When it comes to things like e-cigarettes - "We don't know what we don't know". Therefore we must think critically about this and take a precautionary approach.

For information about e-cigarettes or for more information related to this topic visit the [NB Anti-tobacco coalition website](#). You can also consult the [enclosed CBC web write-up](#).

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