

Young people's use of electronic cigarettes and tobacco products other than cigarettes

Background

Electronic cigarettes are battery-powered devices that look like an ordinary tobacco cigarette. They release flavours as people inhale from them, and do not contain tobacco but can contain nicotine. Although it is currently not possible to legally import and sell electronic cigarettes containing nicotine in New Zealand, they are readily available on the internet.

A recent paper suggested that the rate of New Zealand adult smokers who have ever purchased an electronic cigarette is still low (7%) (Li, Bullen, Newcombe, Walker, & Walton, 2013). Currently little is known about the use of electronic cigarettes among New Zealand youth. It is therefore important to capture and monitor this information so action can be taken if any issues arise (Borland, 2011). Similarly, it is important to capture and monitor other trends around tobacco, including the use of products other than cigarettes such as chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, cigars, cigarillos, little cigars and pipes.

One of the key sources of New Zealand data on youth smoking is the Health Promotion Agency's (HPA's) Youth Insights Survey (YIS). The YIS monitors Year 10 students' behaviours, attitudes and knowledge on a range of tobacco-related topics, including their use of electronic cigarettes and tobacco products other than cigarettes.

Methodology

Participants in the 2012 YIS were asked whether they had ever tried electronic cigarettes, and whether in the past month they had used any form of tobacco products other than cigarettes. Current smokers were also asked a series of questions about smoking cessation. Responses were examined by smoking status (those who had never smoked, compared with current smokers [smoke at least monthly] and ex [no longer smoke] or experimental [smoke less often than monthly] smokers), susceptibility to smoking (non-susceptible never smokers [who said they would 'definitely not' accept a cigarette offered by their best friend or smoke a cigarette during the next 12 months], compared with

susceptible never smokers), ethnicity, gender, school decile status, parental smoking status, and close friends' smoking status. When looking at the differences by ethnicity, gender, school decile, parental and close friends' smoking, we have controlled for individual smoking status. This means we take into account whether or not a respondent smokes to ensure that any group differences found are genuine and not due to the respondent's own smoking status.

Further analyses were undertaken to examine changes over time in other tobacco product use as this question was also asked in 2006, 2008 and 2010.

Only those differences between groups and across time which were statistically significant ($p < .05$) are reported.

How many young people have ever tried electronic cigarettes?

All participants were asked 'Electronic cigarettes are new battery-powered devices that look like a cigarette. They do not contain tobacco, but they release flavours as people inhale from them. Have you ever tried electronic cigarettes?'. Seven percent (6-8%) said 'yes', they had tried electronic cigarettes. Those who were more likely to have tried electronic cigarettes were:

- Current smokers (36%) compared with ex/experimental smokers (13%), and both current and ex/experimental smokers compared with those who had never smoked (2%).
- Those who said one or both of their parents smoked (13%), compared with those who said neither parent smoked (4%).
- Those who said at least one of their close friends smoked (15%), compared with those who said none of their close friends smoked (3%).

Is young people's use of electronic cigarettes related to smoking cessation?

Current smokers were asked 'Do you want to stop smoking now?', 'During the past year (12 months), have you ever tried to stop smoking cigarettes?', and 'Do you think you would be able to stop smoking if you wanted to?'. There were no statistically significant differences in likelihood of current smokers having tried electronic cigarettes by whether or not they wanted to stop smoking, had tried to stop, or thought they would be able to.

Young people's use of tobacco products other than cigarettes in the past month

All participants were asked 'During the past 30 days (one month), have you ever used any form of tobacco products other than cigarettes (e.g. chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, cigars, cigarillos, little cigars, pipe)?'. Four percent (3-5%) said 'yes', they had used tobacco products other than cigarettes in the past month. Those who were more likely to have used other tobacco products were:

- Current smokers (30%) compared with ex/experimental smokers (8%), and both current and ex/experimental smokers compared with those who had never smoked (0.3%).
- Males (5%), compared with females (4%).
- Students at low decile schools (6%), compared with students at high decile schools (4%). The rate for students at mid decile schools was also 4%, however this was not significantly different from either low or high decile.
- Those who said at least one of their close friends smoked (10%), compared with those who said none of their close friends smoked (0.8%).

The rate of young people who used tobacco products other than cigarettes in the past month in 2012 (4%) is similar to 2010 (6%), but has decreased since 2008 (7%) and 2006 (7%).

Key points

- A small minority (7%) of young people had tried electronic cigarettes. Current smokers, those who had at least one parent who smoked, and those who had close friends who smoked were more likely to have tried electronic cigarettes.
- In the past month, 4% of young people had used tobacco products other than cigarettes, such as chewing tobacco, snuff, dip, cigars, cigarillos, little cigars and pipes. This rate is similar to 2010 but lower than in 2008 and 2006. Current smokers, males, students at low decile schools, and those who had close friends who smoked were more likely to have used such products.

About the Youth Insights Survey

- The YIS forms part of the New Zealand Youth Tobacco Monitor (NZYTM), a collaborative effort by the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH).
- The YIS is a nationwide paper-based survey conducted in schools every two years, first carried out in its current form in 2006 and dating back to 1995 in different formats.
- The YIS collects data on smoking-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour, as well as data on students' interests, lifestyles, activities, and media use, and responses to tobacco control initiatives. It monitors a broad spectrum of risk and protective factors that relate to smoking uptake among young people.
- The 2012 YIS was conducted with a sample of 3,143 Year 10 students (14 to 15-year-olds). The school-level response rate was 77%, the student level response rate 82%, and the overall response rate was 65%. The sample included 1,589 NZ European, 704 Māori, 295 Pacific, 340 Asian, and 199 people of 'Other' ethnicity (prioritised ethnicity). Seven percent (n = 222) were current smokers (smoke daily, weekly or monthly).
- The data have been adjusted (weighted) to ensure they are representative of the population of New Zealand Year 10 school students.
- For this analysis, proportions and 95% confidence intervals were produced. Odds ratios were undertaken to compare responses between groups. The significance level used for statistical analyses was set to $\alpha=.05$.
- Comparison groups for these analyses were as follows:
 - Smoking status (current smokers, compared with ex/experimental smokers and never smokers).
 - Smoking susceptibility (susceptible never smokers, compared with non-susceptible never smokers; as determined by answers to the questions 'If one of your best friends offered you a cigarette, would you smoke it?' and 'At any time during the next year (12 months) do you think you will smoke a cigarette?', where non-susceptible never smokers answered 'definitely not' to both questions, and susceptible never smokers answered anything except 'definitely not').
 - Ethnicity (Māori, compared with non-Māori).
 - Gender (females, compared with males).
 - School decile status (as a measure of socioeconomic status; low school decile, compared with medium and high).
 - Parental smoking status (those who indicated that one or both their parents smoked, compared with those who indicated neither of their parents smoked).
 - Close friends' smoking status (those who indicated that at least one of their five closest friends smoked, compared with those who indicated none of their five closest friends smoked).
- A full description of the 2012 YIS methodology and further YIS publications can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications>.

About the HPA

The HPA is a Crown entity that leads and delivers innovative, high quality and cost-effective programmes and activities that promote health, wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, and prevent disease, illness and injury. HPA also enables environments that support health and wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, and reduce personal, social and economic harm.

References

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- Li, J., Bullen, C., Newcombe, R., Walker, N., & Walton, D. (2013). The use and acceptability of electronic cigarettes among New Zealand smokers. *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 126(1375), 48-57.

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