October 2019

Cancer Research UK – E-cigarette Policy Statement

Summary

Cancer Research UK (CRUK) is determined to reduce deaths from smoking-related cancer and supports measures to help people quit. Our goal is to see a tobacco-free UK by 2030. Our tobacco control priorities are to campaign for effective stop smoking services in both community and NHS settings, whilst acting to protect the UK’s world-leading tobacco regulations from the vested interests of the tobacco industry. We want to continue to discourage non-smokers from taking up smoking and support smokers to quit.

E-cigarettes are a relatively new smoking cessation tool and their long-term effects are unknown. We believe their use must be monitored extremely closely, to assess any harms associated with use and/or to see if they encourage non-smokers, particularly young people, to experiment with tobacco. But while the long-term effects of e-cigarettes are unknown, the long-term harms of tobacco are indisputable, and e-cigarettes represent an opportunity for harm reduction. The evidence so far indicates e-cigarettes are less harmful than tobacco smoking and can be an effective quitting tool. Harmful chemicals may be emitted by these devices and, although these are generally at much lower levels than tobacco cigarettes, we don’t know the potential health impacts of using e-cigarettes long term. Non-smokers should never use e-cigarettes and e-cigarettes should be effectively regulated to ensure they are only used by smokers when making a quit attempt or to prevent relapse.

CRUK has increased its investment in e-cigarette research, and part of this is concentrated on answering questions on the long-term impact of e-cigarette use. We also monitor the global literature and trends to inform our position.

Regulation and safety

We need appropriate regulation which seeks to protect young people and non-smokers from taking up e-cigarettes but not by stifling the development of e-cigarettes or making accessing these products more difficult for smokers. The UK and Europe have implemented regulations through the EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD). These regulations concern e-cigarette contents, capacity and promotion, and requires products that make cessation claims be licenced as medicines. CRUK believes these measures will help to ensure that e-cigarette products are safer, more effective, and accessible to smokers. We support light-touch MHRA licencing of e-cigarettes making cessation claims as it will provide a system for assessing the products and evidence supporting their claim, and for tracking adverse reactions.

For smokers who want to quit using e-cigarettes, evidence suggests that they should switch completely and stop using tobacco. ‘Dual use’ of tobacco and e-cigarettes at the same time does not significantly reduce exposure to some key carcinogens.

The TPD allows member states to regulate e-cigarette liquid (e-liquid) flavours. We recognise that flavoured e-liquids may appeal to smokers and play a useful role in helping them to differentiate between smoking and e-cigarette use, and thus may support them to quit tobacco.
CRUK supports existing B/CAP advertising regulations, which do not prohibit the limited advertising of e-liquid flavours, as long as the promotion of those flavours does not appeal to young people (for example by reflecting youth culture).

Protecting children from taking up e-cigarettes

CRUK has spent decades campaigning to discourage young people from taking up smoking and worked hard to ‘de-normalise’ tobacco and would be very concerned at any moves to slow progress or re-normalise smoking. Evidence so far in the UK indicates that regular use (weekly) of e-cigarettes remains low in all children (1.7%) and very low in children who have never smoked (0.1%), and youth tobacco smoking also continues to decline. However, we are concerned by data in the US which suggests an increase in teen vaping in recent years and we are monitoring the situation extremely closely. We would be concerned if similar trends were seen in the UK, and will respond if we see evidence that the situation is changing.

The US-based vaping company Juul introduced their e-cigarette to the UK market in July 2018. Based on the product’s popularity among young people in the US, concerns have been voiced over Juul’s potential appeal to youth in the UK. Unlike the US, the UK and Europe prohibits most forms of e-cigarette marketing and has strict restrictions on e-cigarette advertising to minimise their appeal to children. The UK and Europe set limits on nicotine levels permitted in e-cigarettes through the European Tobacco Products Directive, meaning that the Juul product available in the UK is not the same as the US version.

We are very concerned by the tobacco industry’s use of social media influencers to promote e-cigarettes online and have been working with UK and US health organisations to push for further action to tackle this problem, by both social media companies and national governments. We will continue to closely monitor the impact of Juul and other factors on youth use of e-cigarettes and/or tobacco products.

Cancer Research UK activity

1. **Drive the research agenda**
   CRUK runs the UK E-Cigarette Research Forum in partnership with PHE and UKCTAS, which we use to identify research priorities, generate new research questions, and enhance collaboration within the research community.

   We are convening meetings with national and international scientific funders to share information on e-cigarette research activity and scope joint funding opportunities.

2. **Build the evidence base**
   We are a significant direct funder of e-cigarette research through our Tobacco Advisory Group and Population Research scientific committees. Our focus is on the efficacy of e-cigarettes as a quit tool and safety of these devices.

3. **Influence policy**
   Our priority is to ensure that the UK/EU TPD e-cigarette regulations are not watered down if the UK leaves the European Union.

   We support parts of the UK going further than the TPD in regulating e-cigarettes when there is demonstrable evidence that additional regulations will protect non-smokers and children but not unduly stifle the ability of smokers to access these products and act as a barrier to quitting tobacco.
4. Inform health professionals
As part of our smoking cessation marketing materials to health professionals, e-cigarettes are included as one of several quit tools smokers can use to make a quit attempt.

5. Inform the public
Alongside other stop smoking interventions, we communicate evidence-based, balanced messages on e-cigarettes to public audiences, to both reflect the potential for harm reduction in smokers, and the unknown long-term impacts.