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The Impact of Flavor Descriptors on Nonsmoking Teens' and Adult Smokers' Interest in Electronic Cigarettes

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Abstract

Introduction: Smokers switching completely from combustible cigarettes to electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are likely to reduce health risk, suggesting that e-cigarettes should be made appealing to adult smokers. However, uptake of e-cigarettes by nonsmoking teens would add risk without benefit and should be avoided. Although e-cigarette flavors may appeal to adult smokers, the concern is that flavors might attract nonsmoking teens.

Methods: Nonsmoking teens (n = 216, ages 13–17, no tobacco in past 6 months) and adult smokers (n = 432, ages 19–80, smoking 3+ years; could have used e-cigarettes) were recruited from an Internet research panel. In assessments completed online (May 22, 2014 to June 13, 2014), participants indicated their interest (0–10 scale) in e-cigarettes paired with various flavor descriptors. These were mixed (order balanced) with similar flavor offerings for ice cream and bottled water to mask the focus on e-cigarettes and validate the assessment. Mixed models contrasted interest between teens and adults and among adults by e-cigarette history.

Results: Nonsmoking teens' interest in e-cigarettes was very low (mean = 0.41 ± 0.14 [SE] on 0–10 scale). Adult smokers' interest (1.73 ± 0.10), while modest, was significantly higher overall ($p < .0001$) and for each flavor (most p values $< .0001$). Teen interest did not vary by flavor ($p = .75$), but adult interest did ($p < .0001$). Past-30-day adult e-cigarette users had the greatest interest in e-cigarettes, and their interest was most affected by flavor. Adults who never tried e-cigarettes had the lowest interest, yet still higher than nonsmoking teens' interest ($p < .0001$).

Conclusion: The e-cigarette flavors tested appealed more to adult smokers than to nonsmoking teens, but interest in flavors was low for both groups.

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