CDC Finally Gets Vaping Right, While FDA Permits New Cigarettes

By Alex Berezow, PhD — January 22, 2020

If you're a government agency like the CDC, the best time to admit to a huge mistake is on Friday afternoon before a three-day weekend. And if you're a government agency like the FDA, there's never a good time to make a boneheaded decision.

Thanks in part to the efforts of ACSH and other evidence-minded health policy advocates, the CDC has admitted to a huge mistake. And we know they know it's a mistake because they made the announcement on Friday afternoon before a three-day weekend with little fanfare*. They hoped nobody would notice. But we did.

The Wall Street Journal reports [2] that the CDC updated its website so that it "no longer includes the broad reference to stopping vaping." More than four months ago, we called them out [3] for their ludicrous and counterproductive recommendation that all people avoid e-cigarettes (including smokers who are trying to quit). The CDC finally gave in to science. Better late than never.
The CDC’s new recommendation [4] is to avoid vaping THC products, “particularly from informal sources like friends, family, or in-person or online dealers.” Informal sources. That’s a nice way of saying “illegal, black market products” -- just like ACSH has been saying for months. The CDC went on to recommend that "adults using nicotine-containing e-cigarettes or vaping products as an alternative to cigarettes should not go back to smoking."

YES! Common sense wins at the CDC. How about at the FDA?

**FDA Permits Two New Cigarettes**

Presumably, the FDA doesn't want smokers to die. Yet, it still doesn't put vaping devices -- which are known to help smokers quit and are even recommended by the UK’s National Health Service [6] -- on its list of approved cessation products [7].

What has the FDA done instead? Well, it gave permission for two new types of cigarettes [8] to be sold on the market. Are they low-tar or extra-filtered? Nope. They are low-nicotine, which means that a smoker -- if he or she switched to this new product -- would actually have to smoke more cigarettes to get the same nicotine fix.

The FDA’s rationale is that a low-nicotine cigarette is less likely to cause people to become addicted to smoking. But do you know what else accomplishes that at a far lower level of risk? Vaping.

CDC 1  
FDA 0

*Note: The WSJ says the update was posted on Thursday, but the CDC’s website indicates Friday.*