

Smoke em if you got em: The FDA

By ACSH Staff — May 16, 2012

In [a blog post](#) ^[1] that would be funny if the topic weren't so distressing, ACSH advisor Dr. Michael Siegel, professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences at the Boston University School of Public Health, criticizes the FDA's latest announcement warning smokers about the dangers of using electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes).

[On the FDA's website](#) ^[2], the agency warns that the risks of e-cigarettes aren't precisely known, thus smokers should avoid them and rely instead on FDA-approved smoking cessation methods, such as nicotine replacement patches, gum, and lozenges. Plus, they warn, it's possible that young people might be attracted to e-cigarettes, which could lead them to smoke tobacco.

But, as Dr. Siegel puts it, the FDA is essentially urging smokers to stick to smoking, because, unlike with e-cigarettes, we know exactly what the risks of smoking are and they are extremely high. Additionally, he notes, there is a risk that electronic cigarettes may be attractive to young people and might lead kids to try smoking. With your regular cigarettes, it is a known fact that your using the product will attract kids to smoking.

The overall FDA message on e-cigarettes, in Dr. Siegel's words:

While a preliminary clinical trial demonstrated a 22.5% six-month cessation rate among unmotivated smokers who used electronic cigarettes to try to quit, why take a risk that the true quit rate among highly motivated smokers is lower than that? Why not stick with the reliable and well-documented 8% long-term quit rate that has been demonstrated with the use of approved nicotine replacement therapy?

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross is in complete agreement with Dr. Siegel that the FDA's advice against trying e-cigarettes, because of some supposed potential for risk, is irresponsible and will contribute to people continuing to smoke, resulting in illness, disability, and death. With this message, the FDA is exhibiting a callously uncaring attitude toward the 46 million American smokers, as well as the many millions around the world, who are dying from smoking-related causes. They're basically telling smokers, Just keep on smoking!

A much more balanced FDA message, Dr. Ross says, would explain that, while the precise risks and benefits of e-cigarettes have not yet been assessed in controlled studies, the agency is aware that many people have quit using these products, and research into e-cigarettes is ongoing. The FDA does not have to bend over backwards to tell people not to use these products. And this fantasy that e-cigarettes are somehow going to be taken up by youngsters who will then be led to cigarettes is pure hogwash.

As ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan puts it, The FDA s advice to shun e-cigarettes and stick to the real thing smoking is regulatory malpractice.

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