Most Stores Refuse E-Cigarette Sales to Minors

By ACSH Staff — May 2, 2016

E-cigarettes heat liquid to create a vapor that often contains nicotine and/or flavoring. Often they are inhaled because smokers use them to quit (smoking cessation) or to replace cigarettes (harm reduction.) As e-cigarettes have grown more popular, they have become controversial, and that means rebellious youth may want to give them a try.

Since they are a tobacco product, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been worried that rebellious experimentation might be a gateway to real cigarettes, but surveys so far show little migration. And since e-cigarettes are still unregulated (see the American Council on Science and Health testimony on proposed regulations at the White House here [1]) there is concern about access by youth, which could lead to nicotine addiction.

The free market seems to be handling it.

Between July and October 2015, Canadian teens (ages 15 to 17) went into more than 4,000 stores to try to purchase e-cigarettes and were turned away 67 percent of the time [2], on average. So there are bad actors, as in any business, but not all companies are simply making a buck trying to create a youth market addicted to their product, the way caffeine is promoted.

Ironically, where sales of e-cigarettes to minors are banned (Quebec) stores were mostly likely to sell to them. Montreal only turned away 43 percent of teens.

Convenience stores have been very good about turning away teens in previous studies [3]; they only turned away 85 percent looking for cigarettes but 90 percent were turned away when asking for e-cigarettes. Like the United States, Canada has patchwork regulations rather than a federal standard, which leads to confusion.

So nicotine is being handled, and clearer guidelines should improve that even more, but caffeine addiction among youths is still not a worry among the CDC; Starbucks and Red Bull can sell to anyone they like -- for now. Next month, the International Agency for Research on Cancer is going to label coffee a cancer-causing carcinogen also, so the U.N.’s war on personal behavior will continue, and IARC will continue to cause more confusion between health threats and health scares. ACSH will be continue to be here to clear that up.
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