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ASH welcomes clarity from Public Health England on the safety of electronic cigarettes

ASH welcomes the clear advice about electronic cigarettes issued today by Public Health England (PHE). A review of the evidence published by PHE shows that electronic cigarettes offer a much safer alternative to smoking and more should be done to encourage smokers to switch. In light of this review PHE have, for the first time, published their advice on an appropriate approach to electronic cigarettes for the Government, local authorities and the NHS. [1] [2]

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of health charity ASH said:

“This timely statement from Public Health England should reassure health professionals, the media, and the public, particularly smokers, that the evidence is clear: electronic cigarettes are very much less harmful than smoking.”

She went on to say:

“Quitting completely will always be the best option, and regulation is essential as the market evolves to ensure smokers have access to the safest most effective products, and that uptake by never-smokers remains low. However, if every smoker switched overnight to electronic cigarettes many hundreds of thousands of premature deaths would be prevented in the years to come.”

The popularity of electronic cigarettes has grown enormously since they first came on the market. ASH estimates that there are around 2.6 million regular users in Great Britain nearly all of whom are ex-smokers or smokers trying to quit or cut down. [3]

However, there are still nearly 8 million smokers in England, many of whom would benefit from switching to electronic cigarettes, but who may have been put off doing so because of unfounded health concerns. Data from the ASH Smokefree GB survey published today found differences in the level of understanding between those who use electronic cigarettes and those who do not. [4]

The survey, conducted for ASH by YouGov, found that smokers who've never tried an electronic cigarette are 4 times less likely than ex-smokers who currently use electronic cigarettes to understand that electronic cigarettes are a lot less harmful than smoking.

Likewise ex-smokers who currently use electronic cigarettes are 3 times more likely than smokers who have never tried an electronic cigarette to understand that nicotine in a cigarette is not a significant cause of harm.

The advice from PHE today that health professionals and others should seek to address misunderstandings among the public and provide accurate information to smokers is welcome and will hopefully serve to reduce misunderstanding in the future.

ENDS

Notes and links

Action on Smoking and Health is a health charity working to eliminate the harm caused by tobacco use. For more information see: www.ash.org.uk/about-ash

ASH receives core funding from Cancer Research UK and the British Heart Foundation.

[1] E-cigarettes: an evidence update. A report commissioned by Public Health England. PHE, August 2015. For a copy of the report please contact phe-pressoffice@phe.gov.uk

[2] E-cigarettes: a new foundation for evidence-based policy and practice, PHE, August 2015. For a copy of the report please contact phe-pressoffice@phe.gov.uk

[3] ASH fact sheet: Use of electronic cigarettes among adults in Great Britain.
http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_891.pdf

[4] Total sample size was 12,055. Fieldwork was undertaken between 26th February and 12th March 2015. All surveys were carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB Adults (aged 18+).

	% who agree electronic cigarettes are a lot less harmful than regular cigarettes	% who think none or a very small portion of the health risks of smoking comes from nicotine
Current electronic cigarette user and ex-smoker	67% (n=239)	36% (n=239)
Current electronic cigarette user and current smoker	53% (n=366)	21% (n=366)
Ex-electronic cigarette user and current smoker	33% (n=811)	21% (n=811)
Never electronic cigarette user and current smoker	17% (n=768)	11% (n=826)

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