

Medical Reserve Corps Capability: Electronic Smoking Devices



What are ESDs?

Electronic smoking devices (ESDs), sometimes called e-cigarettes, heat and vaporize a solution that typically contains nicotine. ESDs may mimic the look and feel of a real cigarette or resemble pens or other innocuous objects.

Why should the public health community care?

The following are some of the potential public health risks associated with ESDs:

- **Health risk to user** through inhalation of unregulated ingredients and toxins. Long-term effects of ESDs are still unknown, due to the brevity of ESDs' existence;
- **Availability to youth** as unrestricted products in many jurisdictions;
- **Secondhand exposure** to aerosols emitted by devices; and
- **Child poisoning** due to consumption of non-childproof refill liquids that are often fruit- and candy-flavored.

What are the effects on youth?

According to the 2014 National Youth Tobacco Survey, from 2011 to 2014, e-cigarette use among high school students increased by nearly 800%. In 2014, use of e-cigarettes by high school students surpassed use of all other tobacco products combined.^{1,2} These data demonstrate that ESDs are an emerging threat to the health of youth.



Myth:
ESDs are
harmless.

Truth: The aerosol emitted by ESDs is not water vapor. The aerosol contains many substances, including nicotine, ultrafine particles, volatile organic compounds, and toxins known to cause cancer. Sufficient peer-reviewed, published scientific evidence exists to determine that secondhand aerosol is not harmless.³ In fact, the aerosol is a new source of air pollution that should not be permitted in smoke-free environments.⁴

[FACT SHEET]

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How can the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) help?

Sixty-seven percent of MRC units are housed in local health departments. In the absence of overarching laws and product regulation, local health departments are establishing policies regarding ESDs to protect their communities. The following are some ways that MRC units can help local health departments minimize public health risks and build demand for ESD laws by informing the public of the hazards of ESD use:

- Get to know the existing laws in a jurisdiction (see <http://www.no-smoke.org/pdf/mediaordlist.pdf>);
- Work with local health departments to enact policies. Adding simple ESD restrictions to existing smoke-free policies can make a huge impact. Learn how Chicago enhanced its smoke-free ordinance (see http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdph/supp_info/tobacco_alcohol_drug_abuse/smoke_free_illinoisact.html);
- Inform the public through community activities, such as health fairs, and share existing resources such as the fact sheet *Electronic Smoking Devices (ESDs) and Smokefree Laws* with local public venues and restaurants;⁴
- Partner with a local organization (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, after-school programs) to assist in educating youth;
- Visit local ESD retailers and ask them to discourage sales to minors; and
- Highlight the impact ESDs are having on public health by sharing factual information about youth ESD use¹ and child poisoning⁵ related to nicotine ingestion.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Katie Roulston
Senior Program Assistant
202-507-4283
kroulston@naccho.org

Erica Haller-Stevenson
Senior Program Analyst
202-888-0442
ehaller-stevenson@naccho.org

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1100 17th St, NW, 7th Floor Washington, DC 20036

P 202-783-5550 F 202-783-1583

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