What is an electronic cigarette [e-cigarette]?

E-cigarettes are appearing for sale in local stores, specialty stores, gas stations, and the internet across the health authority. They are marketed as a harmless product that “can be used anywhere” and that may help smokers quit. Much is still unknown about these devices, but one thing is clear: e-cigarettes are not recommended for use and are not appropriate in smoke free areas, inside or out.

E-cigarettes have two main components:
1. A battery operated delivery system with a micro-chip and atomizer that vapourizes a liquid chemical solution to mimic the appearance of smoke.
2. A cartridge containing a liquid solution consisting of a number of chemicals, some of which may cause cancer. Cartridges may also contain nicotine. Nicotine e-cigarettes are not authorized for sale in Canada, but are still available in some stores and on the internet.

Are e-cigarettes safe to use?

Safety concerns have been raised for users and those who are exposed to e-cigarette vapours. In fact, Health Canada, the World Health Organization and the US Federal Drug Administration have joined other health organizations in issuing warnings against the use of e-cigarettes. The health impact of repeatedly inhaling e-cigarette chemicals is unknown, and individuals exposed to e-cigarette vapours may be at risk of asthma attacks or other lung irritations.

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Even though nicotine cartridges are not permitted for sale in Canada, they have been found in some stores and are available via the internet. Cases of nicotine overexposure have been reported through ingestion, skin contact, and accidental spills. These dangers are particularly significant for children and animals. Products vary widely in the amount of nicotine & other chemicals they deliver. The list of chemicals used in the fluid is not fully disclosed and there are no labelling requirements.

**What are the current rules in Canada about the sale of these products?**

E-cigarettes that do not make any health claims, for example being marketed as a cessation device, and do not contain nicotine may legally be sold in Canada.

E-cigarettes that do make health claims and/or contain nicotine are not legally sold in Canada. Under the Food and Drugs Act in Canada, all new drugs must be given a market authorization after a review of scientific evidence pertaining to the safety, quality and efficacy of the product. Health Canada has clarified that electronic cigarettes intended to dispense inhaled dosages of nicotine are considered new drugs and as such, fall under this Act. Currently, the sale of these products is not compliant with the Food and Drugs Act. At this time, no electronic smoking products have been granted a market authorization in Canada.

**Are there age restrictions on the sale of e-cigarettes?**

No.

Both the marketing of e-cigarettes as a harmless product and flavours such as chocolate, candy and fruit increase the appeal of these products, particularly to youth. Additionally, these products have negative repercussions including: inappropriate social modelling, an increase of smoking uptake in youth, undermining the efforts of those trying to quit the habit by renormalizing smoking behaviours and serving as a potential gateway to smoking. Studies are showing that use of e-cigarettes by youth is on the rise.

**Will e-cigarettes help me quit?**

There is no evidence that e-cigarettes help smokers quit or that they are safe to use as a cessation aid. Nicotine gums, patches, lozenges and inhalers, as well as various prescription medications have been proven to be safe and effective cessation aids.

**Island Health does not recommend using e-cigarettes as a tobacco cessation aid or in smoke free areas. For more information, contact your local Island Health Tobacco Prevention and Control Office.**