

Everyone knows them, and one in five smokers tries them: E-cigarettes in Germany

A survey by the German Cancer Research Center

Almost everybody in Germany knows what e-cigarettes are, and almost 10 percent of 16-to-19-year-olds have tried them – about the same rate as tobacco smokers in this age group. Interest in e-cigarettes is particularly high among smokers: About 25 percent of smokers between the ages of 16 and 39 years have tried them at least once. Even so, fewer than one percent of smokers are regular users of e-cigarettes. In 2014, e-cigarettes have been used less frequently as a means of quitting smoking than other nicotine replacement products, and only 0.2 percent of former smokers stated that they used e-cigarettes to quit smoking. These are the results of a survey conducted by the Society for Consumer Research (GfK) under a commission by the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), now summarized in two publications.

The figures mark a strong increase in interest in the new products since the DKFZ commissioned the first survey on the use of e-cigarettes in 2012. By that year, only six percent of the smokers surveyed reported having tried e-cigarettes. In 2013 the number had risen to 14 percent; and in 2014, 19 percent of the smokers and almost nine percent of all survey participants (including smokers, former smokers and non-smokers) stated that they had tried the products at least once. Less than one percent of the respondents, however, use e-cigarettes on a permanent basis. “In Germany, we are currently not witnessing a substitution of tobacco cigarettes by e-cigarettes,” says Dr. Martina Pötschke-Langer, who heads the Cancer Prevention Unit at the DKFZ and commissioned the survey. “This reflects a dual trend in consumption: it is mostly younger people who try the products. They do so for a short time but do not favor them permanently.”

Although the number of users of e-cigarettes is rising, almost three quarters of survey participants are against using them in public, smoke-free areas and think that the smoking ban in restaurants and bars should also apply to e-cigarettes. This is the view not only of non-smokers and former smokers but also of more than 55 percent of smokers. The same rate of smokers also generally approve of the ban on smoking in the catering industry.

The World Health Organization (WHO), which just concluded its Conference of the Parties in Moscow, also recommends banning the use of e-cigarettes in non-smoking areas. When e-cigarettes are used, inhalable particles and small amounts of carcinogenic substances are released, thus affecting the quality of air. Moreover, smokers who see someone consuming an e-cigarette may feel like having a “real” cigarette, which makes them smoke more and weakens their motivation to quit.

The publication from the DKFZ states that e-cigarettes should be subjected to further regulation – similar to tobacco products – for the effective protection of youth and adults from potential nicotine addiction and its resulting health hazards. Appropriate measures would include, for example, a ban on selling e-cigarettes to youth and a ban on the use of flavors that appeal to children. The recommendations appear in the “Government recommendations for electronic inhalation products” (“Regulierungsempfehlungen für elektronische Inhalationsprodukte”).

The publications are available for download at www.tabakkontrolle.de

The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) with its more than 3,000 employees is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany. At DKFZ, more than 1,000 scientists investigate how cancer develops, identify cancer risk factors and endeavor to find new strategies to prevent people from getting cancer. They develop novel approaches to make tumor diagnosis more precise and treatment of cancer patients more successful. The staff of the Cancer Information Service (KID) offers information about the widespread disease of cancer for patients, their families, and the general public. Jointly with Heidelberg University Hospital, DKFZ has established the National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) Heidelberg, where promising approaches from cancer research are translated into the clinic. In the German Consortium for Translational Cancer Research (DKTK), one of six German Centers for Health Research, DKFZ maintains translational centers at seven university partnering sites. Combining excellent university hospitals with high-profile research at a Helmholtz Center is an important contribution to improving the chances of cancer patients. DKFZ is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers, with ninety percent of its funding coming from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the remaining ten percent from the State of Baden-Württemberg.

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