

Marketing of electronic cigarettes: Targeting young people

E-cigarettes in focus at the 2014 Tobacco Control Conference at the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ)

E-cigarettes are no longer a marginal phenomenon in Germany. They are being and advertised in this country on the internet, at gas stations and kiosks, and in supermarkets, like cigarettes made of tobacco. A new publication from the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) now documents the marketing of e-cigarettes on the internet, on TV, at sports events, fairs and sales locations. The publication reports that e-cigarette advertising targets not only adults but also youth. The topic will be a focus when about 250 experts and policy-makers from ten countries meet for the 12th Conference on Tobacco Control at the German Cancer Research Center on December 3-4, 2014.

Pictures of fruit, colorful packages and “fantastic flavors” on e-cigarette packaging suggest a harmless product. Such designs resemble those used in the marketing of candy, and advertising slogans such as “shisha to go” for e-cigarettes with a special mouthpiece suggest that consumers can use them easily on the go. “Brightly colored and rhinestone-covered devices and flavors such as ‘tutti frutti’ or ‘chocolate’ seduce kids and teens to try out e-cigarettes,” says Dr. Martina Pötschke-Langer, head of DKFZ’s Cancer Prevention Unit and editor of the current publication. Manufacturers of e-cigarettes advertise their products with pictures showing attractive young women and men in situations such as parties, at bars, or on adventures that particularly appeal to young people. Manufacturers also make direct contact with potential new consumers at fairs, music festivals, and other events that are particularly popular among youth. On the internet young people are invited to shoot their own videos showing how they use electronic cigarettes and to share them online, an attempt to build a sense of community among users.

In Germany, the advertising of e-cigarettes has not yet been subjected to regulation. By spring 2016 at the latest, when the EU Guideline on Tobacco Products will have been transferred into German law, the practices will be restricted in the same way as tobacco products. But even then it will still be possible to advertise e-cigarettes (like tobacco products) on large posters, at festivals and at other places where they are marketed – which will provide ample opportunities to lure young first consumers into their first use of a product whose effects on health are a subject of concern.

“For public health, e-cigarettes present a greater potential for harm than for benefits, because they endanger previous achievements in tobacco prevention among youth,” says Pötschke-Langer. Therefore, the DKFZ calls for strict regulation of e-cigarettes. Appropriate measures would include, for example, bans on selling e-cigarettes to youth and a comprehensive ban on the advertising of electronic cigarettes and tobacco products alike.

The publication is available at:

http://www.dkfz.de/de/tabakkontrolle/Rote_Reihe_Tabakpraevention_und_Tabakkontrolle.html

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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