

Flashy, new tobacco device can lead teens to become lifelong smokers

A new device that heats tobacco without burning it is coming to town. It claims to be safer than cigarettes. Don't be fooled. Whether liquid, solid, gas or vapor, nicotine and tobacco are not healthy in any amount, warns the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

These heat-not-burn tobacco products just became legal in the United States. They are different from vape pens, JUUL and e-cigarettes.

IQOS ("I Quit Ordinary Smoking") is the brand that is being marketed as "a better alternative to smoking." Because the tobacco is heated, the company claims that it gives off lower amounts of chemicals than burned tobacco. These claims are based on research by the tobacco industry. Independent studies need to be done to help understand the health effects of using heat-not-burn devices.



Dr. Jenssen

No matter what form nicotine takes, it always connects people back to cigarettes, said Brian Jenssen, M.D., FAAP, an expert on tobacco and children's health.

"Safer doesn't mean safe. Cigarettes are the only legal product on the market that will kill you if used as intended," he said.

The IQOS heat-not-burn device uses a disposable tobacco unit called a heat stick that the smoker inserts into an electronic holder. Each heat stick contains about the same amount of nicotine as one cigarette. An electronic heat element warms the stick and releases an aerosol that the user inhales.

The aerosol contains nicotine, chemicals, additives and flavorings. Like a cigarette, it gives off secondhand aerosol that is unsafe to breathe, Dr. Jenssen said.

Companies that make products like e-cigarettes, vape pens and JUUL claim they can help smokers quit. But evidence suggests they lead to cigarette use and are a way for the tobacco industry to attract new customers, he said.

"These are still tobacco companies that have a 50-year history of manipulation, trying to rebrand themselves to frame themselves as part of the solution. They're still part of the problem," Dr. Jenssen said.

Instead of avoiding tobacco, teens are using new devices in record numbers. Almost 40% of 12th-graders admitted to vaping at least once in 2018, according to a national survey. Thirty percent of kids who use e-cigarettes start smoking cigarettes, cigars or hookahs within six months.

The AAP says prevention is the most effective way to protect kids from tobacco. It supports laws that prevent tobacco companies from advertising their products to children. The AAP also supports a ban on flavored products that appeal to children and a minimum legal age of 21 years to buy nicotine products. For more information, visit https://downloads.aap.org/RCE/IQOS_Factsheet.pdf.



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