

Smoke-free alternatives: Some facts

The World Health Organization estimates there are about 1 billion smokers in the world today—and come 2025 this number will be roughly the same.¹

The best choice any smoker can make is to quit tobacco and nicotine altogether. But many don't. These adults deserve a pragmatic approach that moves them away from cigarettes.

Today, there are products that can help enable such approach. The vast majority of harmful compounds found in cigarette smoke and associated with smoking-related diseases are generated by combustion. Products that eliminate combustion, such as e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products (HTPs), and oral smokeless products, exist today.

Smoke-free products are not risk-free and contain nicotine, which is addictive. However, provided they are scientifically substantiated and manufactured under the appropriate safety and quality controls, they are a better choice for adult smokers than continued smoking.

Not all tobacco and nicotine containing products are the same. Regulation should allow adult smokers to have access to, as well as accurate and non-misleading information about smoke-free alternatives and how they are fundamentally different to cigarettes.

Smoke-free alternatives are just that—free of smoke

By not burning tobacco, smoke-free products don't create smoke. HTPs generate a nicotine-containing aerosol by heating tobacco to temperatures sufficient to release nicotine and flavors from the tobacco, but low enough to prevent the tobacco from burning. E-cigarettes (also known as vapes, e-vapor products or electronic nicotine delivery systems) heat a liquid solution containing nicotine and flavors to produce an aerosol, which some call a vapor—hence the term “vaping”. Oral smokeless products refers to tobacco (known as snus) and tobacco-free nicotine-containing, smoke-free products designed for oral use.



Regulation should allow accurate and non-misleading information about, and access to, alternatives for adult smokers who would otherwise continue to smoke.

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Nicotine in smoke-free products

Most smoke-free products contain nicotine. The reason for this is because nicotine, alongside taste and ritual, plays an important role in switching from cigarettes to smoke-free products. In order to switch completely, smokers need to find these products acceptable substitutes for cigarettes.

Nicotine, while addictive and not risk-free, is not the primary cause of smoking-related diseases. This has been recognized by many experts and institutions. For example, the U.K. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has stated that “it is primarily the toxins and carcinogens in tobacco smoke—not the nicotine—that cause illness and death”.²

The problem with burning

In a cigarette, combustion occurs when it is lit, generating smoke. The smoke formed contains more than 6,000 chemicals, many of which have been classified by public health authorities as causes or potential causes of smoking-related diseases.

By eliminating the combustion, or burning process—as is the case with smoke-free products—there is no smoke and the levels of harmful chemicals generated can be significantly reduced compared with cigarette smoke. Of course, whether a product reduces emissions of harmful chemicals compared with cigarette smoke has to be scientifically assessed on a product-by-product basis.

Science-backed, smoke-free alternatives can complement existing measures to help address the global health issue of smoking by providing an avenue for adults who don't quit tobacco and nicotine altogether to make a better choice than continued smoking. Coupled with the right regulatory encouragement and support from society, we can reach a smoke-free future, faster.

1. WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco smoking 2000-2005, 2018
2. NICE Public Health Guidance: Tobacco Harm Reduction Approaches to Smoking (2013)

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