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MEDIA RELEASE: for immediate release

TGA overreacts to vaping study

Today's warning by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (1) about the 'serious health risks' from e-cigarette liquid is disproportionate and misleading and will cause unnecessary alarm according to the health promotion charity, the Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (ATHRA).

The warning was based on a study in the *Medical Journal of Australia* (2) which found traces of nicotine in a small number of supposedly 'nicotine-free' e-liquid samples. Trace amounts of several other chemicals were identified, one of which can irritate the lungs and skin.

According to Conjoint Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn, chairman of ATHRA, the risk from the chemicals detected in the samples is trivial.

'The average concentration of nicotine found was about 15 times less than the average strength of nicotine used in vaping liquids. This dose is extremely small and is unlikely to have any significant effect on health'.

'Trace amounts of several chemicals were also identified. It is impossible to say if these are toxic without knowing the dose and the level at which they cause harm. Neither were provided.' he said.

'To help people understand the real level of risk, the TGA warning should have included a comparison with the risks from smoking, which are infinitely greater' Dr Mendelsohn said. Vapour is not risk-free and is known to contain low doses of chemicals. However, tobacco smoke contains over 7,000 chemicals and toxins in much higher doses and is far more harmful.'

The risk from long term vaping is likely to be no more than 5% of the risk from smoking according to the UK Royal College of Physicians (3) and Public Health England (4).

'Smokers who switch to exclusive vaping are likely to have substantial health improvements. For many, this change will literally be lifesaving' Dr Mendelsohn said.

'Managing the issue of nicotine contamination is simple', said Dr Joe Kosterich, a director of ATHRA. 'E-liquids need to be legalised and regulated so that quality and safety standards can be applied. Currently there are no regulations at all.'

'These e-liquid solutions could have been mixed in someone's kitchen sink without any care or expertise, with the same utensils used to make nicotine e-liquid.'

ATHRA believes that vaping products are consumer products which should be regulated by the [Australian Competition and Consumer Commission](#) not the TGA (5).

'The TGA is responsible for regulating medicines and medical devices and should not have a mandate over vaping products as they do not make therapeutic or medicinal claims' Dr Kosterich said.

ENDS

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What is ATHRA?

Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (ATHRA) is a registered health promotion charity established to reduce the harm from tobacco smoking in Australia. ATHRA aims to raise awareness of less harmful alternatives for adult smokers who are otherwise unable to quit. ATHRA's broader goal is to encourage the complete cessation of tobacco smoking in Australia. For more information, visit www.athra.org.au.

ATHRA is funded by unconditional donations from businesses and the general public. It does not accept donations from tobacco companies or their subsidiaries.

None of the directors has ever had any financial or commercial relationship with any electronic cigarette or tobacco company.

References

- (1) A warning to consumers about the serious health risks relating to e-cigarette liquid. Therapeutic Goods Administration. Available at https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/warning-consumers-about-serious-health-risks-relating-e-cigarette-liquid?fbclid=IwAR3dtEVyAn4O3l6mJCBn_rjwRzcbqWYESTDeHR1BtuOMnLFfLE4Sx6Cx_6A
- (2) Chivers E et al. Nicotine and other potentially harmful compounds in “nicotine-free” e-cigarette liquids in Australia. Medical Journal of Australia 2019. Available at <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2019/210/3/nicotine-and-other-potentially-harmful-compounds-nicotine-free-e-cigarette>
- (3) Nicotine without smoke: Tobacco Harm Reduction. Royal College of Physicians 2016. Available at: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/nicotine-without-smoke-tobacco-harm-reduction-0>
- (4) Evidence review of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products 2018. Public Health England 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/e-cigarettes-and-heated-tobacco-products-evidence-review>
- (5) Who should regulate vaping? (Hint: not the TGA). ATHRA 2018. Available at: <https://athra.org.au/who-should-regulate-vaping-hint-not-the-tga/>

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