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MEDIA RELEASE: for immediate release

## Regulation of nicotine liquid would help prevent further deaths

An infant in Victoria is reported to have died recently after ingesting liquid nicotine. (1) The Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association would like to extend condolences to the parents and family of the child.

According to Conjoint Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn, Chairman of ATHRA, 'The tragic case supports the ongoing campaign to regulate nicotine in Australia.'

'Nicotine liquid for vaping is effectively illegal in Australia and therefore unregulated, however it is being increasingly used by smokers as a quitting aid. Bans prevent us from having any control over the quality and safety of nicotine products and packaging' he said.

Vaping nicotine is a much less harmful alternative to smoking. A study last week in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that vaping is twice as effective as conventional nicotine replacement products such as nicotine patches and gums in helping adult smokers to quit. (2)

ATHRA has been arguing for nicotine liquid to be legalised and regulated for some time. 'Appropriate regulation would maximise the benefits of vaping for addicted smokers while minimising the risks such as the potential poisoning of children'.

'Regulation would include child-proof containers, clear labelling with safety warnings, quality and safety standards and limitations on the maximum strength of nicotine available. Some imported products have extremely high levels of nicotine which can be very toxic' he said.

'Fortunately, serious reactions and deaths from accidental poisoning are unusual. Ingestion of nicotine usually results in vomiting. We are only aware of 3 other infant deaths globally since vaping became available over ten years ago. There are now about 40 million vapers worldwide', Dr Mendelsohn said.

A recent report from the Australian Poisons Centres found that accidental nicotine poisoning is extremely rare in Australia and is usually mild and self-limiting. (3) Over an 8-year period from 2009-2016 there were 202 calls to Poisons Centres about nicotine liquid and vaping products, representing less than one in five thousand calls. There were no serious adverse effects or deaths.

'However, nicotine is potentially toxic in children and we need to do everything we can to reduce the risk of further tragedies like this one' Dr Mendelsohn said.

Other safety advice from ATHRA includes taking special care not to leave open containers within reach of children and disposing of containers carefully. Users should take care to reduce contact with the skin and wash hands promptly after contact.

'This case involving an apparent death of a child is a reminder that if nicotine was legal it could be regulated to minimise the risk of serious illness or death' Dr Mendelsohn said.

## ENDS

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### References

- 1) Victorian baby dies after being poisoned by liquid nicotine from an e-cigarette. Herald Sun. 6 February 2019 [[link](#)]
- 2) Hajek P, Phillips-Waller A, Pfzulki D, et al. A randomised trial of e-cigarettes versus nicotine replacement therapy. New England Journal of Medicine 2019 [[link](#)]
- 3) Wylie C, Heffernan A, Brown JA, et al. Exposures to e-cigarettes and their refills: calls to Australian Poisons Information Centres, 2009–2016. Medical Journal of Australia 2019 [[link](#)]

### 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](http://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.

### Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association

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