9 September 2019

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**New evidence that vaping nicotine is an effective quitting aid and is not linked to the US lung disease outbreak**

The Australia Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (ATHRA) has welcomed findings from a large New Zealand study from the University of Auckland which has confirmed the effectiveness and safety of vaping nicotine as a quit smoking aid.

The randomised controlled trial (1) of 1,124 smokers found that after 6 months, 7% of smokers who used vaping combined with nicotine patches had quit, compared to 2% of those using nicotine patches alone. The study was published today in the leading medical journal, Lancet Respiratory Medicine and was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand.

Conjoint Associate Professor Colin Mendelsohn, a Director of ATHRA said ‘the findings add to the growing evidence that vaping is an effective quitting aid for smokers and could have a huge impact on public health’.

“The authors calculated that if vaping with nicotine was legalised in Australia, the combined therapy of vaping and nicotine patches could potentially lead to 130,000 to 260,000 more people becoming smoke-free than if only patches were used” he said.

Side-effects of the combined treatment were uncommon and there were no serious harmful effects.

Dr Mendelsohn emphasised that vaping nicotine to quit smoking should be distinguished from the inhalation of black-market recreational drugs which have caused an outbreak of serious lung disease in the US. (2)

It is now clear that this outbreak which has claimed five lives is almost certainly due to contaminated THC liquid (the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis) being used in vaping devices.

Vitamin E acetate has been identified as the likely causative agent. This oily substance causes severe inflammation when inhaled into the lungs and has been found in all the samples tested by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (3)

“It’s understandable that some Australians are confused about the risks from vaping with some health organisations and experts carelessly implying that nicotine vaping is the cause of these tragic deaths in the US,” Dr Mendelsohn said.

“It would be a disaster if vapers went back to smoking, or smokers avoided switching to vaping because of these misleading safety concerns as that would ultimately cost more lives. “

Professor Peter Hajek, Director of the Tobacco Dependence Research Unit, Queen Mary University of London agreed. (4) “Although the scare is being used to put smokers off switching from cigarettes to much less risky vaping, it has nothing to do with e-cigarettes as they are normally used’.

Dr Mendelsohn said “Millions of people have been vaping nicotine for over a decade without any evidence of serious lung damage. Vaping is a safer substitute for smokers who are unable to quit smoking or nicotine with the available treatments.”

“Australia remains the only western democracy to ban the use and sale of nicotine for vaping. However, in countries where nicotine vaping is freely available, it is the most popular quit smoking aid” he said.

**ENDS**

1. Walker N et al. Nicotine patches used in combination with e-cigarettes (with and without nicotine) for smoking cessation: a pragmatic, randomised trial. Lancet Respiratory Medicine 2019 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(19)30269-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600%2819%2930269-3)
2. An update on the lung disease outbreak in the US.
<https://athra.org.au/blog/2019/09/07/an-update-of-the-lung-disease-outbreak-in-the-us>
3. CDC Press release. 6 September 2019
<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0906-vaping-related-illness.html>
4. Expert reaction to paper and commentary on recent cases of harm through vaping in the US. UK Science Media Centre. 6 September 2019
<https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/expert-reaction-to-paper-and-commentary-on-recent-cases-of-harm-through-vaping-in-the-us/>

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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](http://www.athra.org.au).

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

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

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ATHRA is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission | ABN 72 6222 11223