ISSUE BRIEF:

Protecting indoor air quality

MMA POSITION:

The dramatic growth of e-cigarette use remains a public health concern. The MMA supports efforts to protect indoor air quality by barring the use of the devices in all public indoor spaces.

BACKGROUND:

E-cigarettes are battery-powered products that deliver nicotine and flavorings via a vapor inhaled by the user. In the decade since their introduction, use of e-cigarettes has grown dramatically, with revenues from sales in 2013 topping $1 billion.

The safety of e-cigarettes remains in question; no study has proved they are harmless. Some studies have detected the presence of carcinogens and heavy metals in e-cigarette vapor.\(^1\)\(^2\) E-cigarettes are not governed by the FDA, so concentrations of nicotine and other potentially harmful ingredients in vaping fluid are not regulated, and ingredients aren't required.

E-cigarettes are not a proven mechanism for helping people quit their dependence on tobacco, and the FDA has not approved their use for smoking cessation. In fact, recent surveys have shown that most Minnesotans who use e-cigarettes are also users of conventional tobacco.\(^4\)

Use of e-cigarettes among young people is rising dramatically, and more Minnesotans between the ages of 18 and 24 years now use e-cigarettes than conventional tobacco.\(^4\) A study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that e-cigarette use by middle and high school students doubled from 2011 to 2012.\(^4\) E-cigarette manufacturers and retailers have responded to this market by making flavors that appeal to kids including bubble gum, chocolate and cotton candy. For young people, e-cigarettes may well serve as a “gateway” to the use of conventional cigarettes and other tobacco products with known risks.

TALKING POINTS:

→ Little is known about the health risks of the secondhand vapor emitted by e-cigarettes. Until more is known, legislators should retain the standard for clean air in Minnesota set by the Freedom to Breathe Act and bar e-cigarette use in indoor public places.

→ Minnesota’s rate of smoking has never been lower, due in part to the actions of legislators to protect public health by reducing nicotine exposure by passing the Freedom to Breathe Act. With so much unknown about the safety of e-cigarettes, the Legislature should err on the side of protecting public health through careful, thoughtful policies that mirror those addressing tobacco use.

→ What the e-cigarette manufacturers want is for their product to become socially accepted and for e-cigarette use in public to become routine. It’s part of Big Tobacco’s strategy to make these products appear safe. It took far too long for science to recognize the tremendous harm done by tobacco and for government to regulate its use. Let’s not make the same mistake here.


\(^{4}\) MATS: The Minnesota Adult Tobacco Survey: Tobacco Use in Minnesota 1999-2014