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The Relationship between E-cigarette Information Seeking and Trust in Sources of Information on E-cigarettes and Respective Use

Electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use can lead to nicotine addiction, acute lung and respiratory illness, and death. While the use of e-cigarettes as a cessation aid remains controversial, they contain toxic and potentially carcinogenic compounds and the FDA does not consider any product safe. In 2018, 3.2% of US adults reported e-cigarette use, including 7.8% of people aged 18 to 24, representing an increase from previous years. A better understanding of factors related to decisions about the use of e-cigarettes is warranted. This study examined the relationship between e-cigarette use and e-cigarette information seeking behavior and trust in sources of information on e-cigarettes.

Using a cross-sectional retrospective study design, we analyzed data from the Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) FDA Cycle 2 (2017). Participants included civilian, non-institutionalized, US residents aged 18 and older, surveyed using a one-time mail questionnaire. Current e-cigarettes users included individuals that reported use either some days or every day. E-cigarette information seeking behavior included searches for health effects, quitting or reducing smoking, list of chemicals, cost/coupons, instructions/tutorials, where to buy products, and reviews/ratings of brands. Trusted sources for e-cigarette information included health care providers, family/friends, government health agencies, health organizations, religious organizations, tobacco companies, and e-cigarette companies. Frequencies identified differences in participant demographic characteristics. Chi-square and Fisher exact tests determined statistically significant differences between current electronic cigarette users and non-users.

Of the 1736 participants included in this study, majority reported as female, non-Hispanic White, college graduates, making between \$100,000 and \$199,999, and 2.7% identified as e-cigarette users. Chi squared analysis found that current users were more likely to search for instructions/tutorials, places to buy e-cigarettes, and cost/coupons, compared to non-users. Also, compared to non-users, e-cigarette users reported more trust in information from electronic cigarette companies and less trust in government agencies relative to non-users.

While previous research has found electronic cigarette information seeking behavior to be associated with use, these results provide greater insight into the specific types of information that users are seeking relative to nonusers. These results can inform targeted prevention and cessation interventions to discourage e-cigarette use.