

Over 2 Million Britons Now Regularly Use Electronic Cigarettes

Monday 28 April, 2014

Figures released by health charity ASH [1] on the day the ASA's consultation on the advertising of electronic cigarettes closes [2] reveal that usage of electronic cigarettes among adults in Britain has tripled over the past two years from an estimated 700,000 users in 2012 to 2.1 million in 2014. [3] Nearly two-thirds of users are smokers and one third are ex-smokers, an increase in the proportion of ex-smokers compared to previous years. Once again, current use of electronic cigarettes amongst self-reported non-smokers is negligible (0.1%) and only around 1% of never smokers report ever trying electronic cigarettes.

The YouGov survey, commissioned by ASH, reveals a dramatic rise in the number of current and ex-smokers who have tried electronic cigarettes over the past four years. In 2010, only 8.2 per cent of current or ex-smokers had ever tried electronic cigarettes. By 2014, this figure had risen to 51.7 per cent.

There has been a consistent rise in the number of current or ex-smokers who use electronic cigarettes on a regular basis from 2.7 per cent in 2010 to 17.7 per cent in 2014.

Just over a third (35%) of British adults believe that electronic cigarettes are good for public health while around a quarter (22%) disagree.

For the first time, the ASH YouGov survey asked about the type of electronic cigarette commonly used. Over a half of electronic cigarette users started off using rechargeable electronic cigarettes with prefilled cartridges, with only one in four starting by using cigarettes with a tank or reservoir. But amongst current users the balance is more evenly split with 47% most often using rechargeable e-cigarettes with prefilled cartridges and 41% using rechargeable devices with a separate tank. Only 20% started off using disposable electronic cigarettes and only 8% most often use disposable e-cigs currently.

There are a variety of reasons given by current and ex-smokers for why they use or have tried electronic cigarettes. Among current users of electronic cigarettes:

The main reasons given by ex-smokers are "to help me stop smoking entirely" (71%) and "to help me keep off tobacco" (48%).

The main reason given by current smokers is to "help me reduce the amount of tobacco I smoke, but not stop completely" (48%) followed by "to save money compared with smoking tobacco" (37%); and "to help me stop smoking entirely" (36%).

Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive of health charity ASH said:

"The dramatic rise in use of electronic cigarettes over the past four years suggests that smokers are increasingly turning to these devices to help them cut down or quit smoking. Significantly, usage among non-smokers remains negligible.

While it is important to control the advertising of electronic cigarettes to make sure children and non-smokers are not being targeted, there is no evidence from our research that e-cigarettes are acting as a gateway into smoking."

A separate ongoing survey - the Smoking Toolkit Study carried out in England - has also found that smokers are increasingly using electronic cigarettes as an aid to quitting, overtaking use of medicinal nicotine products such as patches and gum. [4] The proportion of smokers who have quit in the last year has increased and smoking rates in England are continuing to fall.

Commenting on the findings, leader of the study, Professor Robert West, said:

"Despite claims that use of electronic cigarettes risks renormalizing smoking, we found no evidence to support this view. On the contrary, electronic cigarettes may be helping to reduce smoking as more people use them as an aid to quitting."

- Ends -

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Action on Smoking and Health is a health charity working to eliminate the harm caused by tobacco use.
For more information see: www.ash.org.uk/about-ash

For further information on the YouGov survey data see the ASH fact sheet on Use of electronic cigarettes in Great Britain at: http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_891.pdf

[1] YouGov Survey. Total sample size was 12,269. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th and 14th March 2014. All surveys were carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB Adults (aged 18+).

[2] The consultation document is available at:

ASH's response to the CAP and BCAP consultation on the marketing of e-cigarettes is available at:

http://www.ash.org.uk/files/documents/ASH_914.pdf

[3] Methodology: Calculations are by ASH. We applied the proportions of e-cigarette use by smoking status in the 2014 YouGov survey to the most recent available ONS mid-year GB population estimates (2012).

[4] West R, Brown J & Beard E. Trends in electronic cigarette use in England. Smoking Toolkit Study. University College London, 4th April 2014 update.

<http://www.smokinginengland.info/latest-statistics/>

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