

Fact or Fiction Answers

General Tobacco Use

1. Most teenagers smoke.

Fiction. Most teenagers do not smoke. Nationally, less than 20% of high school students use any type of tobacco product. The current rates of use for individual products are 7.6% for cigarettes, 11.7% for electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs, 3.3% for hookah/waterpipe, 5.5% for smokeless tobacco (snuff, dip, chew), and 7.7% for cigars.

2. Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 100,000 deaths per year in the United States.

Fiction. Cigarette smoking causes more than 480,000 deaths each year in the United States. This is nearly one in five deaths. Smoking causes more deaths each year than the following causes combined: Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), Illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle injuries, and firearm-related incidents. Worldwide, tobacco use causes nearly 6 million deaths per year, and current trends show that tobacco use will cause more than 8 million deaths annually by 2030.

3. The nicotine found in products such as cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, and electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs is considered to be as addictive as heroin and cocaine.

Fact. Nicotine is the chemical in all tobacco products that causes addiction, which has been shown to be as addictive as these other drugs. Nicotine is found in cigarettes, cigars, smokeless tobacco (e.g., snuff, dip, and chew), hookah/waterpipe, and electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs. Once a tobacco user has become addicted to nicotine, it is very difficult to quit using tobacco. The difficulty is due in part to a chemical called dopamine that is released in the brain when nicotine is consumed, making the tobacco user feel good. When nicotine is not consumed, and dopamine is not released, the user is likely to experience symptoms of withdrawal. These symptoms are unpleasant, and may include craving, headache, hunger, irritability/anger, difficulty thinking, and weight gain. To prevent these symptoms, the user continues consuming nicotine from their tobacco product.

4. Somewhere, down the road, smoking will kill you...but everybody is going to die anyway.

Fact. Smoking actually shortens life expectancy. However, smoking can also affect the quality of life for young and old alike. It affects breathing, and so interferes with physical activity at any age. Smoking leads to more colds and bronchitis in teens and adults. Among people who have quit smoking, many feel improvements in both physical and mental health, even if they quit at a young age.

Health benefits of quitting smoking can begin as early as 20 minutes after your last puff! Within 20 minutes after quitting, your heart rate drops back to a normal level. Within 12 hours of quitting, carbon monoxide levels in your blood drop down to healthy levels. Two weeks to 3 months after quitting, the risk of having a heart attack starts to lower, and lung function improves. Within 9 months of quitting, coughing and shortness of breath decrease. One year after quitting added risk of heart disease is half that of a smoker's!

5. Advertising has little or no effect on teen smoking or vaping.

***Fiction.** Advertisements by the tobacco companies influence young people to start using tobacco. Tobacco ads make smoking appear to be appealing, which can increase teens' desire to smoke. The tobacco companies use specific tactics to target teens. For example, they place many ads at stores near schools and playgrounds, and pay to have their products placed in popular movies that teens watch.*

The electronic cigarette/vape/JUUL industry uses similar tactics to the tobacco industry in targeting teens, with messaging associating vaping with sex, independence, and rebellion. Electronic cigarette/vape/JUUL use among teens also with growth in marketing. For example, social media increases in mentions of JUUL products was highly correlated with retail sales of the product.

6. Tobacco smoke contains 69 known cancer-causing substances.

***Fact.** Tobacco smoke contains at least 250 harmful chemicals, and at least 69 of those chemicals can cause cancer. Tobacco products that are not smoked also contain many cancer-causing chemicals. For instance, smokeless tobacco products (snuff/dip/chew) are found to contain approximately 30 chemicals that cause cancer. Electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUUL also exposure users to similar chemicals, though the total number is currently unknown. In a recent study (Rubinstein et al., 2018), teens who used electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs an average of 12 days per month had more harmful chemicals in their body than teens who did not use electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs or any other tobacco product.*

7. It takes a long time to get addicted to products containing nicotine.

***Fiction.** Symptoms of nicotine addiction can occur in as little as a few days or weeks after starting to smoke occasionally. This means that a person can become addicted to nicotine even if they smoke only a few cigarettes per week. Most adults who smoke regularly began their cigarette use before the age of 18. Nearly 9 out of 10 cigarette smokers first tried smoking by age 18, and 98 percent first tried smoking by age 26.*

Electronic Cigarette/Vape Use

1. Teens who use electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs do not go on to smoke cigarettes.

Fiction. Relative to teens who have never used electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs, those who have used these products are more likely to try cigarettes and to go on to smoke cigarettes regularly.

2. Electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs are bad for you.

Fact. There is conclusive evidence that, in addition to nicotine, most electronic cigarette/vape/JUUL products contain many dangerous substances. Nicotine intake from electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs is similar to intake from regular cigarettes. Some chemicals in the vapor of electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs can be harmful to lung cells. While electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs may have lower risks than regular cigarettes for adults, they may still increase risk of cancer and other dangerous health outcomes.

3. The vapor produced by electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs consists primarily of water.

Fiction. The liquid used in electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs consists primarily of nicotine, propylene glycol, and vegetable glycerin. Users who inhale the vapor are also exposed to other chemicals known to be harmful to the lungs, such as formaldehyde, diacetyl, and acrolein.

4. The flavorings used in electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs are safe to eat, but are not safe to inhale into the lungs.

Fact. Some flavors in the liquids have shown to contain chemicals that are linked to lung disease, such as diacetyl in butter flavorings and benzaldehyde in cherry flavorings.

5. Electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs are the same product as E-Hookah and E-Cigars.

Fact. All of these products use liquid with similar ingredients (e.g., nicotine, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerin, flavorings) that is vaporized for inhalation by the user. They also all have similar features, such as a tank to hold the liquid, a heating element to vaporize the liquid, and a battery to power the heating element. Thus, while their design may appear different (e.g., e-cigars look like cigars), they are essentially the same product.

Hookah/Waterpipe Use

1. Hookah/waterpipe smoke is less harmful than cigarette smoke.

Fiction. Hookah poses many of the same health risks as cigarettes. Smoking hookah delivers nicotine, just like cigarettes, and the smoke is at least as toxic as cigarette smoke. Hookah smokers also may absorb more of these toxins, because people tend to take more puffs and larger puffs from a hookah in one sitting than they would from a cigarette.

2. The harmful chemicals from hookah/waterpipe smoke are eliminated when the smoke passes through water.

Fiction. The water filters out little to none of the harmful ingredients in hookah smoke, including dependence-producing nicotine, cancer-causing agents, and heavy metals.

3. Infections may be passed between smokers who share a hookah/waterpipe.

Fact. Sharing hookahs/waterpipes increases risk of infectious diseases of the mouth, lips, gums, and lungs. Such diseases include oral herpes, hepatitis, lung disease, and flu.

4. The use of shisha that is "herbal" rather than tobacco-based is safe to use.

Fiction. Smokers who use shisha that is herbal are still exposed to carbon monoxide, toxic metals, and chemicals known to cause cancer. Some of these same chemicals are released into the air when herbal shisha is smoked, and thus nonsmokers can be exposed to them secondhand.

5. Smoking hookah/waterpipe tobacco is different than vaping a hookah pen.

Fact. Smoking a hookah/waterpipe involves inhaling air that contains combusted charcoal and heated tobacco. Vaping a hookah pen involves inhaling a liquid that has been vaporized, and that liquid typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerin, and/or flavorings. A hookah pen does not contain plant tobacco. However, it contains the same ingredients as those found in electronic cigarettes/vapes/JUULs, and some of the ingredients have shown to be harmful to health.

Cigar/Cigarillo Use

1. A small cigar is typically about the same size as a cigarette and usually includes a filter.

Fact. A small cigar looks very similar to a cigarette in terms of its shape, size, and packaging. Small cigars also often contain a filter on the end where the lips are placed, much like the filters on cigarettes.

2. Cigarillos do not usually have a filter, but sometimes have wood or plastic tips.

Fact. Cigarillos are larger than cigarettes and small cigars, but smaller than large cigars. Popular brands of cigarillos are Black&Milds, Swisher Sweets, and Phillies, and these products come in a variety of flavors (e.g., vanilla, wine, cherry, mango, sour apple). Cigarillos are made by wrapping the shredded tobacco leaves with a paper that is also made from tobacco. In contrast, cigarettes are wrapped in paper that is not made from tobacco.

3. Cigar/cigarillo smokers are not exposed to harmful chemicals if they don't inhale the smoke.

Fiction. Even when cigar smokers do not inhale, they expose their lips, tongue, and throat to smoke and its toxic chemicals that cause serious health conditions like cancer.

4. Cigarillo smokers can reduce their risks of cancer if they remove the inner tobacco liner before smoking, a process called "hyping", "freaking", or "champing".

Fiction. Some cigarillos contain a liner of tobacco on the inside, and this liner is sometimes removed prior to smoking. Many users refer to this liner as "cancer paper", and believe that if they remove it they will decrease their cancer risk. There exists no evidence that supports this idea.

5. Small cigars and cigarillos are cheaper and advertised more heavily in African American neighborhoods.

Fact. Tobacco companies have a history of targeting the African American community to sell their products. Neighborhoods with predominantly African Americans have more stores that sell tobacco products and more exterior advertisements (locations outside the store to be easily seen by those walking or driving by) for tobacco products. They also offer tobacco products at prices that are lower than in other neighborhoods. These tactics are used to increase African American's use of these products.

Smokeless Tobacco Use

1. Smokeless tobacco can be used to help quit smoking.

Fiction. There is no evidence that suggests that smokeless tobacco products help smokers quit using cigarettes. While there are many FDA approved treatments that have been rigorously tested and shown to be effective (such as nicotine replacement therapy) there has been no such testing for smokeless tobacco as a cessation aid. Additionally, smokeless tobacco still contains nicotine, and is linked to several types of cancer.

2. Smokeless tobacco can cause gum disease, tooth decay, and tooth loss.

Fact. Users of smokeless tobacco products have an increased risk of a variety of oral health conditions. Chemicals in these products affect various processes in the mouth, such as narrowing the blood vessels, preventing the formation of new blood vessels, and decreasing the function of immune cells. They also lead to gum recession, whereby a gap forms between the gums and the teeth and allows bacteria to build up. The sweeteners used in smokeless tobacco can cause tooth decay.

3. Moist snuff may be packaged in ready-to-use pouches that resemble small tea bags.

Fact. Moist snuff packaged in small pouches are referred to as “snus” (pronounced “snoose”, like “loose”). Snus comes in a variety of brands from Sweden (e.g., General) or the United States (e.g., Camel, Marlboro), and in flavors such as wintergreen, spice, and frost. Unlike traditional forms of snuff/dip/chew, snus is spitless. That is, users do not have to regularly spit out the juices from the product like is required when traditional snuff/dip/chew is used.

4. Nearly 30 cancer-causing chemicals have been found in smokeless tobacco.

Fact. Smokeless tobacco products, like snuff, dip, and chew, contain what are called tobacco-specific nitrosamines. These chemicals are found only in the tobacco plant, and have shown to cause cancer in users of these products. In addition to nitrosamines, other cancer-causing chemical have also been found (e.g., polonium-210; polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons).

5. Snus is more harmful than traditional forms of smokeless tobacco like snuff, dip, or chew.

Fiction. Snus is at least as harmful, and perhaps less harmful, than these traditional smokeless tobacco products. The tobacco in snus products is processed in such a way to reduce the levels of tobacco-specific nitrosamines that cause cancer. However, levels of these and other harmful chemicals are not equal across all brands of snus. Therefore, some snus brands may contain lower levels, and other brands may contain higher levels, of certain chemicals than products like traditional snuff/dip/chew.