

Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping- Topic of the Month

UPDATED APRIL 2026

Electronic cigarettes (E-Cigs) are non-combustible products containing varying amounts of nicotine. These products also contain flavoring and glycerin, and may contain other ingredients, including illegal substances. Vaping refers to inhaling and exhaling the vapor produced by E-Cigs. Read this memo to learn about the risks associated with electronic cigarettes and vaping.



Source: About E-Cigarettes (VAPES). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. October 24, 2024.

Caution

In 2016, the *Federal Drug Administration (FDA)* modified the definition of “tobacco products” to include electronic delivery systems. In 2019, there were reports of an [Outbreak of Lung Injury Associated with the Use of E-Cigarette, or Vaping, Products](#). This led to a diagnosis of a condition called [e-cigarette, or vaping, product use-associated lung injury \(EVALI\)](#). EVALI is a diagnosis of exclusion, meaning providers would rule out other conditions based on symptoms. Symptoms of EVALI include shortness of breath, fever, cough, dizziness, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, rapid heart rate, and chest pain.

While investigations of the cause of lung injury were focused on uncontrolled and unregulated vaping products as a primary concern, **overall tobacco use continues to be a major health concern.**

Under Minnesota State Law, the sale of tobacco, tobacco-related devices, or electronic delivery devices is prohibited to persons under the age of 21. ([2022 MN Statutes, Chapter 609, Section 609.685](#))

Health advisory

In 2018, MDH shared a [Health Advisory- Nicotine Risks for Children, Teens, and Pregnant Women](#), highlighting research that has shown tobacco use causes adverse health risks to pregnant women, the unborn fetus, and their children. **Tobacco use, in any form, results in nicotine in the bloodstream that can be transferred to the fetus via the amniotic fluid.** Health officials cannot guarantee the safety of these over-the-counter tobacco products for anyone using them or those directly exposed to their use.

An aerosol used in E-Cigs to produce vapor contains ultrafine particles, oils, and heavy metals that can injure users' lungs. People using e-cigarettes as a replacement for traditional cigarettes, continue to put themselves at risk for lung injury (leading to illness, pneumonia, or even death), as well as affecting cardiovascular health and central nervous systems, adverse brain development (impacting attention, learning, and impulse control), and possible mood disorders (including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts).

[Secondhand Smoke](#) is another concern. Exposure to the vapors produced by E-cigs and smoke from burning tobacco products can trigger those with breathing problems, increasing their risk of illness. **CDC reports that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.** Even brief exposure can cause immediate harm.

WIC's role

WIC's role is to assess exposure to tobacco during the WIC nutrition assessment and provide education and guidance to participants as needed. Share the [Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs](#) nutrition education card with the participant. Referrals to smoking cessation programs may be provided when *any* tobacco product is reportedly used.

Associated risk codes:

- Risk code [371- Nicotine and Tobacco Use](#) should be assigned when a pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum participant reports *any smoking of nicotine and/or tobacco products, i.e., cigarettes, pipes, cigars or electronic nicotine delivery systems (e-cigs or vapes), hookahs, smokeless tobacco (chewing tobacco, snuff, or dissolvable), or nicotine replacement therapies (gums or patches).*
- Risk code [904- Environmental Tobacco Smoke Exposure](#) (ETS) should be assigned when reported *exposure to smoke from tobacco products inside enclosed areas, like the home, place of childcare, etc. ETS is known as secondhand, passive, or involuntary smoke. This includes exposure to the aerosol from electronic nicotine delivery.*

Participants experiencing symptoms related to lung injury should be directed to seek care from their healthcare provider.

Participant talking points

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- Maternal smoking, inhaling, and ingesting nicotine while pregnant or breastfeeding exposes the fetus/infant to nicotine and many other toxic components.
- Tobacco products, and tobacco-like products, include cigarettes, E-cigs, cigars, cigarillos, hookahs, pipes, chewing tobacco, and snuff.
- [Secondhand Smoke](#) poses further risk to your infant and young children. Learn how to keep your family safe.
- Accidental exposure to the liquids contained in E-cigs can result in nicotine poisoning at high enough doses, especially in children.
- The State of Minnesota has a free smoking cessation plan. Check out [quit partner](#) or call 1(800)-QUIT-NOW (784-8669) or contact your health care provider.

Staff resources:

- [E-cigarettes and Vaping](#) (MDH)
- [Get Help Quitting](#) (MDH)
- [Promoting Quitting and Treatment](#) (MDH)
- [About E-Cigarettes \(Vapes\)](#) (CDC)
- [E-Cigarettes, Vapes, and other Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems \(ENDS\)](#) (FDA)

Discuss vaping using a participant-centered approach

Using [PCS Counseling Skills](#) to evoke change can be challenging, particularly when it comes to discussing habit-forming substances like tobacco. When approaching the topic of tobacco use, use reflective listening and affirmations to let the participant know you are not judging them. Always ask permission before sharing concerns, information, and resources.

Let's practice!

Background: Sasha is a pregnant woman who has been smoking for a few years and has recently switched to vaping, as a “healthier” substitute for smoking cigarettes. This is her first appointment with WIC. She shared that she is typically a good eater, so nutrition is not really a concern for her.

CPA: Sasha, I am so glad you were able to make it today. Thank you for sharing your thoughts on nutritious eating. Now that I have shared with you what WIC offers, may I ask you some questions about yourself?

Sasha: Sure, I mean, I guess that's why I'm here.

CPA: (smiles) Absolutely! Learning more about you will help me to direct our conversation as well as our services. What concerns, if any, do you currently have about your health?

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Sasha: Well, after I found out I was pregnant, I decided I should probably quit smoking. I thought I would try vaping instead because I've heard it can be safer for the baby.

CPA: Wow, it's great that you are committed to finding ways to be a healthier mom! How is it going with not smoking cigarettes?

Sasha: It's good - at the mall, I see this poster showing that cigarettes can be really bad for my baby's lungs. I haven't had even one.

CPA: You're correct - the nicotine in cigarettes can damage a developing infant's lungs. I think it's great that you have been able to cut them out completely. Tell me, have you heard anything about vaping when pregnant?

Sasha: I read online that vaping has less nicotine, so I figured it must be better.

CPA: It's great that you are doing your research. May I share with you a few things I have learned about vaping?

Sasha: Okay.

CPA: Maybe you've seen vaping in the news lately. There's a lot of information out there saying it's better than cigarettes, but there can be some risks as well. Research shows that vaping can have varying levels of nicotine, which is something you mentioned, but the nicotine from vaping is still absorbed into your bloodstream and can be transferred to your fetus through the amniotic fluid. There are also tiny particles from the aerosol in the vapor that are absorbed into the lungs of the person vaping, along with the nicotine.

Sasha: Oh wow, I didn't know that. I don't understand why it's promoted as safe, then.

CPA: I hear you; it's confusing! With vaping being so new, there's not a lot of research yet, and there is still a lot to learn. However, the current recommendation for pregnant women is to avoid smoking in general. Do you have any thoughts about that?

Sasha: Well, I don't know if I could quit completely. It felt easy having the vape to fall back on.

CPA: I understand that it's hard to change habits, and having an alternative feels safe for you. Would you be open to hearing about a few programs that could help you learn about other options?

Sasha: Sure, I mean it couldn't hurt.

CPA: (smiles) I am happy to hear you are open to hearing about some options! I see that you are on MA. Did you know there is a free program called Quit Partner that helps people when they are trying to stop using tobacco?

Sasha: It's free? That's amazing. I really need to start saving money with the new baby coming. I guess that would help in more ways than one!

CPA: You're right about that, too! Especially since you are already committed to making healthy changes for you and the baby. This would be a great place for you to start. Thank you for sharing with me your thoughts and concerns about smoking. I'll get you the contact information for the programs we discussed.

Be sure to summarize at the end of the appointment what was discussed and provide a handout or contact information for any referral mentioned.

Reference – complete listing of hyperlinks:

About E-Cigarettes (VAPES) (<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/about.html>)

Outbreak of Lung Injury Associated with the Use of E-Cigarette, or Vaping, Products
(https://archive.cdc.gov/#/details?url=https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/e-cigarettes/severe-lung-disease.html)

e-cigarette, or vaping, product use-associated lung injury (EVALI) (<https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/evali>)

2022 MN Statutes, Chapter 609, Section 609.685
(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/609.685>)

Health Advisory- Nicotine Risks for Children, Teens, and Pregnant Women
(<https://www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/nicotine/docs/2017nicadvisory.pdf>)

Secondhand Smoke (<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/secondhand-smoke/index.html>)

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/gendrugs.pdf>)

371- Nicotine and Tobacco Use
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/371.html>)

904- Environmental Tobacco Smoke Exposure
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/904.html>)

E-cigarettes and Vaping
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/ecigarettes/docs/ecigarettes.pdf>)

Get Help Quitting (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/quitting/index.html>)

Promoting Quitting and Treatment
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/tobacco/initiatives/cessation/index.html>)

About E-Cigarettes (Vapes) (<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/about.html>)

E-Cigarettes, Vapes, and other Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS)
(<https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/products-ingredients-components/e-cigarettes-vapes-and-other-electronic-nicotine-delivery-systems-ends>)

PCS Counseling Skills
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/counseling.html>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL, MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this

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information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942. *This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*