aping helps thousands to quit smoking

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Smoking electronic cigarettes is an estimated 95 per cent safer than tobaccoGETTY IMAGES

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Electronic cigarettes helped 18,000 people quit smoking for good last year, according to a study which suggests they are on course to save thousands of lives.

Smokers’ chances of quitting have risen since vaping became popular, say researchers who warn against overzealous regulation of e-cigarettes.

About 2.8 million people in Britain use e-cigarettes and Public Health England has estimated they are 95 per cent safer than tobacco.

Researchers report in *The BMJ* that e-cigarettes helped to improve success rates for quitting last year, estimating that there were 54,000 extra short-term quitters, of whom 18,000 are likely to stay off cigarettes long term. This could save about 10,000 lives, they say.

Professor Robert West of UCL, one of the study’s authors, said: “This is vindication of the English government’s approach to e-cigarettes which is to regulate them in a way that encourages their use for quitting while minimising their use by non-smokers.”

A separate Cochrane review of gold-standard research confirmed that e-cigarettes double the chances of giving up smoking. Vaping was found to be as good as other nicotine replacements with no serious side effects so far.