**-cigarettes are 'one way bridge to tobacco': Scientists say gadgets 'desensitise' teenagers to the dangers of smoking**

* **University of Michigan study said e-cigarettes a 'gateway to tobacco'**
* **Research said teenage users four times more likely to smoke cigarettes**
* **But University College London study called them 'significantly safer'**

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Electronic cigarettes are a ‘one-way bridge’ to smoking tobacco among teenagers, experts have claimed.

The study, by scientists at the University of Michigan, last night fuelled a growing row over the benefits and dangers of e-cigarettes.

The US team said using the nicotine gadgets ‘desensitised’ teenagers as to the harms of tobacco, meaning they were four times as likely to go on to smoke cigarettes.

But British researchers criticised the design of the study and dismissed its findings as ‘trivial’.

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A study by the University of Michigan has claimed electronic cigarettes 'desensitise' teenagers to the harms of tobacco, making them four times more likely to smoke the real thing (file picture)

Just yesterday a major study by University College London reported e-cigarettes were significantly safer than tobacco and would help people quit cigarettes.

The senior author of that study, Professor Robert West, said it was ‘frustrating’ that research which highlighted the danger of e-cigarettes are given so much publicity.

He said virtually all users of e-cigarettes were past smokers – not the other way around.

And he accused US researchers of waging a ‘moral crusade’ against e-cigarettes, claiming many scientists exaggerated their findings to achieve publicity and recognition.

E-cigarettes contain a liquid form of nicotine that is heated into vapour to be inhaled, avoiding the harm caused by tobacco smoke.

Nearly three million adults in Britain have used e-cigarettes in the decade they have been on the market.

Health experts agree that the devices are much safer than smoking tobacco – and the gadgets are thought to have helped 22,000 people quit smoking each year.

But many are concerned about unresolved safety concerns, while others are worried they provide a ‘gateway’ for teenagers to go on to smoke tobacco.

The latest study, published in the journal Tobacco Control, examined data from American pupils in their final year of high school in 2014 and again a year later.

Questioning 17 and 18 year olds, the researchers found that those who had used e-cigarettes but had never smoked tobacco, were more than four times as likely to try cigarette smoking in the next year.

Those who tried ‘vaping’ were also more likely to move away from the perception of cigarettes as posing a ‘great risk’ of harm, the authors added.

They said this finding was ‘consistent with a desensitisation process’.

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But a major study by University College London reported e-cigarettes were significantly safer than tobacco and would help people quit cigarettes (file picture)

‘These results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting vaping as a one-way bridge to cigarette smoking among youth,’ the scientists wrote.

‘Vaping as a risk factor for future smoking is a strong, scientifically-based rationale for restricting youth access to e-cigarettes.’

But the findings were criticised by UK scientists.

Professor Peter Hajek, director of the Tobacco Dependence Research Unit at Queen Mary University of London, said: ‘This paper just shows that teenagers who try cigarettes are more likely to also try e-cigarettes - and the other way round - compared to teenagers who do not do such things. This is trivial.

‘People who read sci-fi novels are also more likely to watch sci-fi movies than people who do not like sci-fi. There is no reason why these activities should be performed in one order only.’

Professor Linda Bauld of the University of Stirling added: ‘If trying an e-cigarette causes regular smoking, then we should be alarmed.

‘However, this study and previous American studies which have made similar assertions have not found this, and so we must be very cautious about jumping to such a conclusion on the basis of this study.’

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4202072/E-cigarettes-one-way-bridge-tobacco.html#ixzz4c3oLycwY>   
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