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E-cig liquid lethal to children if ingested - Study

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A recent study by researchers at Washington University in St. Louis reveals that many parents who use electronic cigarettes are not aware of the dangers that they present for their children.

The results of the study were published in the Academic Pediatrics journal.

The use of electronic cigarettes in the United States has increased dramatically in the last few years, as have the number of emergency calls to poison control centers around the country.

Apparently, many adults who use these alternatives to traditional tobacco products are unaware of the dangers they present to children, as evidenced by the findings of a study conducted by researchers from the School of Medicine at Washington University in St. Louis.

To reach these conclusions, the researchers pored over the results of a self-administered survey that 658 parents took during office visits to 15 pediatric practices in the St. Louis region between June 24 and November 6, 2014.

Ninety-five percent of them were aware of e-cigs, and of these, 21.0% had tried e-cigs at least once, and 12.3% reported e-cig use by more than one person in their household.

An additional 17.3% reported regular cigarette use.

In two-thirds of the households where children were exposed to e-cigs, traditional tobacco products were also being used.

The results indicated that most respondents from e-cig-using homes did not think e-cigs were addictive (36.9% minimally or not addictive, 25.0% did not know).

While 73.7% believed that e-liquid was very dangerous for children if they ingested it, only 31.2% believed skin contact to be very dangerous.

In 36.1% of e-cig-using homes, neither childproof caps nor locks were used to prevent children's access to e-liquid, which was most commonly stored in a drawer or cupboard (34%), a purse or bag (22%) or on an open counter (13%), the study showed.

An important security measure

The liquid in e-cigs is a mixture of nicotine, glycerin and glycol ethers that if ingested even in the quantity of a single teaspoon could be lethal to a child, with smaller amounts still able to cause nausea and vomiting that require emergency care.

Exposure to skin also can sicken children.

"These are largely avoidable risks, but because e-cigarettes are relatively new, many people -- including pediatricians -- aren't aware of the dangers or the steps that should be taken to protect children from them," said first author Jane Garbutt, MD, a professor of medicine and of pediatrics at the School of Medicine.

In dealing with this problem, medical prevention is key.

And yet, according to the study, only 15.3% of the participants reported that their child's pediatrician was aware of e-cig use in the home and that only 6% had discussed necessary security measures with the pediatricians.

"The easiest way to lower risk is to store e-liquid out of the reach of children," said Dr. Garbutt, adding, "We strongly encourage pediatricians to ask parents about nicotine use, including e-cigarettes, and to discuss the risks of exposure."

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