VAPE FLAVOURS THAT CAN APPEAL TO YOUTH

Protecting youth from the vaping crisis

What needs to be done?

To protect youth from the escalating vaping crisis, Heart & Stroke urges that the federal government adopt immediate measures such as an Interim Order under the *Department of Health Act* until more permanent and comprehensive regulations are developed. Four immediate actions are required to curb this crisis among youth in Canada:

- Restrict marketing and promotion of vape products similar to those on tobacco products
- Adopt comprehensive ban on vape flavours and additives with few exceptions (for instance tobacco flavour)
- Limit on nicotine content of a maximum of 20 mg/ml
- Place large rotating health warnings on vape products.

Why we need to do this?

Canada is currently facing a youth vaping crisis. Use and addiction of vape products among youth is skyrocketing[1–3] and vaping related health risks are becoming more established.[4–7] Product advertising is rampant,[8–10] young people are being enticed[10–12] with over 7,700 attractive flavours,[13] and quickly hooked with high nicotine levels.[14,15] A lack of health warnings leave consumers uninformed and naïve to health risks.

Why Now?

Although e-cigarettes or vape products are less harmful than conventional cigarettes, they are not without harm. Vaping is linked to respiratory injury[16] and an increase in blood pressure.[5] Recently there have been several thousand cases of severe vaping related lung illnesses across North America and many deaths in the US.[7,17]

Evidence on the effectiveness of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation remains inconclusive. E-cigarettes are not recognized or medically approved as cessation devices, nor have they proven to be successful on their own in larger population studies. Heart & Stroke recommends that people use medically approved cessation therapies and speak with their healthcare provider if they have tried quitting without success.[18–21] The most common pattern of use in Canada is dual use of both vape and combustible tobacco products,[22,23] putting users at increased risk for stroke[24] and heart attack.[4] There is also a growing concern that youth vapers are now part of a new generation of people addicted to nicotine who would have never been smokers.

Emerging evidence indicates that there is potential for e-cigarettes to be a gateway to tobacco,[24,25] cannabis[26] and nicotine addiction.[15,27] Nicotine can damage the developing brain.[28,29] E-cigarettes are appealing to youth with 34% of grade 7 - 12 students in Canada reporting having ever tried an e-cigarette and 20% reporting current use.[1] Another recent

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study found a 74% increase of current vape use among 16 - 18 year olds in Canada from 2017 to 2018.[2] Teens see e-cigarettes as "cool" or "fun" and can be naïve to health risks.[30]

Advertising and promotion of e-cigarettes, especially of attractive fruit or candy flavoured e-liquids, is common despite prohibitions on the promotion of vaping products that are deemed appealing to young persons by the *Tobacco and Vaping Products Act* (TVPA).[31,32] Flavoured vapes play a huge role in enticing youth to vape, habitual use,[33] and possibly the initiation of tobacco.[34] In one study over 90% of youth and young adults reported their first e-cigarette was flavoured.[35] The availability of flavours (especially fruit, sweet and dessert flavours) remains a key reason for and aspect of e-cigarette use.[33,36–38] Numerous jurisdictions around the world including many Canadian provinces have proposed restrictions on flavoured vape products as a means of combatting escalating use among youth.

Flavours attract youth to vape products but high nicotine content hooks them.[15,39] The current nicotine content thresholds for vape products in Canada are excessive and dangerous. Some of the most popular vape products among youth can be paired with nicotine-enhanced e-liquids which can deliver the same amount of nicotine as a package of cigarettes.[40,41] The European Union and other countries have recognized the need to limit nicotine levels with an upper threshold of 20 mg/ml in an effort to control the addictiveness while still facilitating the potential cessation benefits of these products.[42]

Heart & Stroke's recommended policy measures could protect youth from the harms of vaping, while still allowing adult smokers unable to quit the ability to access vape products. During the 2019 Canadian federal election all major political parties surveyed indicated their support for restrictions on vape products.[43] In September 2019, eight leading health organizations including Heart & Stroke and the Canadian Medical Association called for the use of an Interim Order to immediately address the youth vaping crisis.[44] The Chief Medical Officers of Health across Canada have publicly called for action on youth vaping.[45] Furthermore, a 2020 Pollara Strategic Insights public opinion poll found that 80% of people in Canada and 69% of nicotine vape users are concerned about vaping usage levels among youth.[46] This poll also found that 85% of respondents support new government policies to restrict the marketing, sales and use of vaping products among young people under the age of 21.[46] Finally, 77% want the government to adopt policy measures by July 2020, underscoring a need for urgent action.[46]

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