

What Dental Hygienists Need to Know about Snus and E-cigarettes

Recently two new tobacco products, snus and “e-cigarettes” have gained popularity in the United States. Kiosks promoting the use of e-cigarettes are populating today’s shopping malls and snus is now readily available at retailers throughout the country. When asked by patients about these products, how should you as a dental hygiene professional respond? Here is some key information about snus and e-cigarettes that you should know:

Snus

Last year saw the introduction of a new smokeless tobacco product, snus. Snus are a 20 gm combination of tobacco and flavoring in a pouch of teabag-like material. Snus are held between the upper lip and gum. Because they are pasteurized, snus require no chewing or spitting. They are sold in tins that the retailer refrigerates for freshness.

While new to the U.S. market, snus have been common in European countries, Sweden in particular, for decades. Due to increased smoking restrictions in the US, snus have become more popular and available. Because snus have lower levels of carcinogens than other types of smokeless tobacco they are less dangerous than competitive products but they are still not a harmless alternative to smoking. Additionally, some public health officials are concerned because snus can contain a higher concentration of nicotine than other smokeless tobacco and therefore could be more addictive. There is no safe form of tobacco.

E-cigarettes

Manufacturers of e-cigarettes are marketing these products in the following ways: “they look like traditional cigarettes, feel like traditional cigarettes, taste like traditional cigarettes, but they are not traditional cigarettes. It’s just a tar - free way to enjoy smoking!”

E-cigarettes are touted as non –flammable products that use micro - electronic technology to provide a *smoking experience* without the fire, flame, tobacco, tar, carbon monoxide, ash, stub or smell found in real cigarettes. Claims emphasize that smokers still get their nicotine, but do not get the side effects attributable to tar. The advantages, manufacturers state, are: no first or second hand smoke; no odor; no presence of tobacco; no tar; no flammability, so no smoke; no embarrassment or guilt; ease of use, and convenience. Other advantages include: “tobacco - like” taste and flavors, less cost than traditional smoking and no tooth staining or tobacco related skin changes.

For the consumer and health care provider, knowledge of the contents of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) is important. The primary cartridge ingredient is *propylene glycol*, and the secondary ingredients are water, nicotine and a flavor to replicate the taste of traditional smoking. According to the manufacturers, cartridges contain none of the tar or additives found in most tobacco - based products.

Studies conducted by the FDA have provided important information to share with patients. “The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has determined propylene glycol to be *generally recognized as safe* for use in food, cosmetics, and medicines. It is used in food coloring, and flavoring, as an additive to keep food, medicines and cosmetics moist, and in machines that simulate smoke, *although usage in simulating smoking devices is not currently included in the list of uses generally recognized as safe by the FDA.*” FDA Study #1 (July 2009)

FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation purchased two samples of electronic cigarettes and components from two leading brands of ENDS. The samples included 18 of the various flavored, nicotine, and no - nicotine cartridges. The cartridges were analyzed for nicotine content and

other tobacco constituents, some of which are known to be harmful to humans. The FDA found that these products contained detectable levels of carcinogens and toxic chemicals. Testing also suggested that quality control was inconsistent or non-existent.

From a public health perspective, ENDS have the potential to undermine public smoking bans and thwart prevention and cessation efforts by serving as attractive nicotine/tobacco starter products and by asserting that they are safe alternatives to tobacco products. There are at least 24 licensed companies and many more brands and model names with internet websites promoting the attractiveness of ENDS.

In sum, e-cigarette products have not been tested sufficiently and, as based on FDA findings, could pose potential harm to humans.

For additional information about how dental hygienists can get engaged in tobacco cessation efforts visit www.AskAdviseRefer.org, the website that links you to resources offered by ADHA's Tobacco Intervention Initiative. Information about how to get involved in advocating for reduced tobacco use visit www.tobaccofreekids.org.