

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Association Between Youth Smoking, Electronic Cigarette Use, and COVID-19**

According to a recent research study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, as of June 2020, more than 2.1 million people have been infected, and approximately 116,000 have died from Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the U.S. and the numbers continue to rise. Both cigarette and electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use damage the respiratory system potentially increasing the risk of experiencing COVID-19–related symptoms, a positive diagnosis and exacerbated health outcomes.

Hospitalizations in the U.S. show that factors such as obesity, male sex, and older age are associated with COVID-19. Although youth are at relatively lower risk of contracting COVID-19 compared with older adults, given the proportion of youth using e-cigarettes youth e-cigarette and cigarette use may pose an important risk factor for COVID-19.

Currently, there are no U.S. population-based studies assessing the relationship between cigarette smoking, e-cigarette use, and COVID-19–related outcomes. In the absence of information on smoking and e-cigarette use history of youth diagnosed with COVID-19, researchers conducted a population-level examination of whether youth cigarette and/or e-cigarette use is associated with increased likelihood of experiencing COVID-19–related symptoms, being tested, and being diagnosed with COVID-19. The research provides timely evidence that youth using e-cigarettes and dual-users of e-cigarettes and cigarettes are at greater risk of COVID-19. Given the predominance of e-cigarette use among U.S. youth, the investigation informs public health concerns that the ongoing youth e-cigarette epidemic contributes to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Surprisingly, exclusive ever-use of combustible cigarettes was only associated with COVID-19–related testing, whereas both past 30-day use and ever-use of e-cigarettes and dual use were associated with COVID-19 testing and positive diagnosis.

There are a number of potential reasons why both dual use and e-cigarette use were associated with getting infected with COVID-19. Heightened exposure to nicotine and other chemicals in e-cigarettes adversely affects lung function with studies showing that lung damage caused by e-cigarettes is comparable to combustible cigarettes. COVID-19 spreads through repeated touching of one’s hands to the mouth and face, which is common among cigarette and e-cigarette users Furthermore, sharing

devices (although likely reduced while staying at home) is also a common practice among youth e-cigarette users. Additional findings indicate that some racial/ethnic groups, especially among African American, Hispanic, and multirace youth, are at higher risk for COVID-19 and is supported by evidence of densely populated living conditions that make social distancing challenging, greater economic stress, and service-industry work environments where working from home is less feasible and lower access to health care contribute to underlying health issues.

Both obesity and underweight conditions were associated with COVID-19 outcomes. Although at this point obesity is a more well-established risk factor for COVID-19, being underweight also impacts lung function and therefore it is not surprising that it is also a risk factor for COVID-19.

Overall, results of this research study of a national sample of adolescents and young adults show that e-cigarette use and dual use of e-cigarettes and cigarettes are significant underlying risk factors for COVID-19 that has previously not been shown. The findings have direct implications for health care providers to ask all youth and COVID-19–infected youth about cigarette and e-cigarette use history; for parents, schools, and community-based organizations to guide youth to learn more about how e-cigarettes and dual use affect the respiratory and immune systems; for the Food and Drug Administration to effectively regulate e-cigarettes during the COVID-19 pandemic; and for the development and dissemination of youth-focused COVID-19 prevention messaging to include e-cigarette and dual use.

The Journal of Adolescent Health is a peer-reviewed medical journal covering adolescent health and medicine, including biological, psychological, and social aspects. The journal publishes original research articles, review articles, letters to the editor, commentaries, and case reports. For more information please visit [www.jahonline.org](http://www.jahonline.org).

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