

Trial of e-cigarettes (TEC)

Why the research was needed:

Many people have successfully quit smoking using e-cigarettes. However, we need to know if e-cigarettes are as helpful as stop-smoking medications like the patch and gum etc., which are commonly used by the UK Stop Smoking Services. This is important in deciding whether Stop Smoking Services should offer e-cigarettes as part of their treatment.

What we did:

We recruited 886 smokers who wanted to quit at Stop Smoking Services in London, Leicester and East Sussex. They were randomly allocated to receive either NRT of their choice (N=447) or an e-cigarette starter pack (N=439). Everyone also received weekly behavioural support for 6 weeks.

The participants were followed up at 4 weeks, 6 months and 12 months to see how many in each group quit smoking.

What we found:

- E-cigarettes were more effective at helping people quit smoking than NRT. After one year, 18% of participants in the e-cigarette group were still quit and 10% in the NRT group were.
- Participants who had quit smoking in the e-cigarette group were more likely to still use their allocated product at 1 year than those in the NRT group.
- E-cigarette users experienced less urge to smoke than NRT users in the first 4 weeks.
- People who quit smoking using e-cigarettes had a greater reduction in coughs and phlegm than those who quit with NRT; it is possible that one of the ingredients in e-cigarettes (propylene glycol) protects vapers from airborne infections.

The study was published in the New England Journal of Medicine:

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1808779>

This study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Technology Assessment Programme (NIHR HTA Project 12/167/135). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.