



## Pre debate article:

# How and whether e-cigarettes should be used to help people stop smoking

**Smoking is one of the largest causes of death and disease in the developed world, responsible for around 96,000 deaths per year in the UK. If current trends continue, it is estimated that globally, a billion lives will be lost to smoking-related diseases by the end of the 21st century. There is unanimous agreement that we need to reduce smoking prevalence and e-cigarettes may have a role to play in this endeavour but there is less agreement over how and whether they should be used to help people stop smoking.**

There are approximately 2.2m people currently using e-cigarettes in Britain of whom 59% are smokers ('dual users') and 39% are ex-smokers. E-cigarettes are now the most popular method for quitting smoking. However, whilst there is emerging evidence of effectiveness for smoking cessation, many smokers continue to smoke alongside e-cigarette use or report that e-cigarettes are not a satisfying alternative to smoking. A recent report estimated that 2.5% of smokers who used an e-cigarette in their quit attempt

(22,000 people) succeeded where they would have failed if they had used nothing, or a licensed nicotine product purchased over the counter. Data from randomised controlled trials also suggest that e-cigarettes can aid smoking cessation. Pooled results from two trials demonstrated that smokers were twice as likely to quit with a nicotine-containing e-cigarette compared with a no-nicotine (placebo) e-cigarette. Nevertheless, another meta-analysis which included a greater range of other studies concluded that there is no evidence to show e-cigarettes help people quit, or that they may even undermine quitting.

If e-cigarettes can help smokers to stop smoking, this needs to be balanced against any transition into smoking via e-cigarettes in those who would not otherwise have smoked. Although there is no evidence to support this at present, many professionals working in the area of public health are concerned that this gateway effect may materialise and in turn undermine recent public health gains made from tobacco control.

It is in this context that we are hosting a panel discussion, bringing together a group of highly influential and knowledgeable speakers to explore how and whether e-cigarettes should be used to help people quit smoking. The panel discussion will draw on the opinions and expertise of professionals from a diverse range of areas. Experts include: Martin Dockrell, Tobacco Control Programme Lead for Public Health England; Professor Peter Hajek, Head of Psychology at Wolfson Institute of Preventative Medicine; Alyssa Best, Policy advisor for Cancer Research UK; Professor Andy Parrott, Professor of Psychology at the University of Wales; Patrick Saunders, Professor of Public Health and FPH Board Member; and Dr Helen Walters, Public Health Consultant in Public Health Medicine.

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