



HAL
open science

E-cigarettes: from nicotine to cannabinoids, the French situation

Jérémie Pourchez, Valérie Forest

► **To cite this version:**

Jérémie Pourchez, Valérie Forest. E-cigarettes: from nicotine to cannabinoids, the French situation. The Lancet Respiratory Medicine, 2018, 6 (5). hal-01891306

HAL Id: hal-01891306

<https://hal.science/hal-01891306>

Submitted on 23 Oct 2018

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

E-cigarettes: from nicotine to cannabinoids, the French situation

Jérémy Pourchez, PhD^a and Valérie Forest, PhD^a

^a Université de Lyon, IMT Mines Saint-Etienne, Centre CIS, INSERM, SainBioSE, F-42023
Saint-Etienne, France.

* Corresponding author: Jérémy POURCHEZ

École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Saint-Etienne

158 cours Fauriel, CS 62362

42023 Saint-Etienne Cedex 2. FRANCE.

Email address: pourchez@emse.fr - Telephone number: +33477420180

The promotion of vaping to reduce tobacco-related harms is debated worldwide. E-cigarettes could play a role in public health if they are shown to be effective and safe cessation aids. In January 2018, two comments illustrated the substantial controversy regarding e-cigarettes in the UK^{1,2}. Despite this debate, vaping has become the most popular cessation aid in the UK; the British situation is therefore being carefully watched by public health bodies around the world.

By contrast, things are moving more slowly in France in terms of attitudes towards e-cigarettes. In 2016, 34.5% of French people aged 15-75 smoked tobacco, while only 3.3% used e-cigarettes³. In February 2016, the French High Council for Public Health stated that vaping was “a tool for reducing the risks of smoking” and “a smoking cessation aid for smokers”⁴. However, it also stated that e-cigarettes “may act as a way to start smoking” and “run a risk of renormalising tobacco consumption”⁴. In May 2017, the French National Cancer Institute concluded that “health risks are expected to be reduced for tobacco smokers who switch to e-cigarettes”. However, the health effects of prolonged use of e-cigarettes are not yet known, which is why their use is discouraged among non-smokers. In May 2017 the French National Public Health agency claimed that a high proportion of French vapers were either current smokers (48.0% daily, 41.2% occasionally) or former smokers (10.8%)³, with a tendency to quit tobacco smoking or to reduce the number of cigarettes they smoked every day by at least half⁵.

While controversy about the role of vaping in smoking cessation continues to rage, a new debate is growing around e-cigarettes and cannabinoids. Recently, many French media outlets have published content denouncing the vaping of cannabis derivatives. In November 2017, “Le Parisien” newspaper headlined: “Cannabis: the worrying success of the electronic joint” [<http://www.leparisien.fr/societe/cannabis-l-inquietant-succes-du-joint-electronique-28-11-2017-7419270.php>]. This trend deserves further exploration. First, e-cigarettes are increasingly being used as a new device for inhaling Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the primary psychoactive drug of the cannabis plant. In France the sale, transport and production of THC-containing products for personal use remains prohibited⁶. Concomitantly, cannabidiol (CBD) vaping is becoming more common in France in the second half of 2017, with anecdotal reports that sales of CBD e-liquid have been increasing. As CBD is considered non-psychoactive, pure CBD-based e-liquids of synthetic origin, as well as CBD products with THC content lower than 0.2%, are legal in France⁶.

Cannabinoids are increasingly used in France for recreational purposes (*e.g.* smoked cannabis or CBD vaping) and for medical applications (*e.g.* to relieve some symptoms of multiple sclerosis). Based on lessons learned from the controversy surrounding nicotine vaping, the risks and benefits of cannabinoid vaping should be discussed. Even if e-cigarettes can be considered as a promising harm reduction strategy of smoked cannabis, as for nicotine vaping the potential issues are: exposure to airborne toxicants, limited evidence to support the efficacy in smoking cessation, and a possible gateway to start smoking. There is an urgent need for a scientific debate to inform political and regulatory decisions, and the sale of cannabinoid-based e-liquids, health warnings and better consumer information.

Conflict of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

References

- 1 Bareham D, Ahmadi K, Elie M, Jones AW, McKee M. E-cigarettes: further flavours of controversy within the controversy. *Lancet Respir Med* 2018; **6**: 16–7.
- 2 Flint SW, Jones AW. The irresponsible promotion of e-cigarettes and Swaptober. *Lancet Respir Med* 2018; **6**: e3–4.
- 3 Pasquereau A, Gautier A, Andler R, *et al.* Tobacco and e-cigarette in France: levels of consumption according to the preliminary results from the 2016 Health Barometer. 2017 http://invs.santepubliquefrance.fr/beh/2017/12/2017_12_1.html.
- 4 HCSP. The risks and benefits of electronic cigarettes for the general population. Paris: Haut Conseil de la Santé Publique, 2016 <https://www.hcsp.fr/Explore.cgi/avisrapportsdomaine?clefr=591>.
- 5 Pasquereau A, Guignard R, Andler R, Nguyen-Thanh V. Electronic cigarettes, quit attempts and smoking cessation: a 6-month follow-up. *Addict Abingdon Engl* 2017; **112**: 1620–8.
- 6 Legifrance. Arrêté du 22 août 1990 portant application de l'article R. 5132-86 du code de la santé publique pour le cannabis. "French legislation lays down a derogation from the general prohibition of cannabis concerning the industrial and commercial use of cannabis strains that do not have psychoactive properties", <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006076590>.