

Electronic cigarette awareness, use, and perception of harmfulness in Brazil: findings from a country that has strict regulatory requirements

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Abstract

Given the uncertainties regarding electronic cigarettes' (e-cigs) impact on health, in 2009 Brazil prohibited sales, importation or advertisements of these products until manufacturers are able to show they are safe and/or effective in smoking cessation. This study sought to analyze: (1) awareness of electronic cigarettes, ever-use and recent use; (2) perception of harmfulness of electronic cigarettes when compared with conventional cigarettes; and (3) correlates of awareness and perception of harmfulness. This is a cross-sectional study among Brazilian smokers (≥ 18 years) using the Wave 2 replenishment sample of the Brazilian International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey. Participants were recruited in three cities through a random-digit dialing sampling frame between October 2012 and February 2012. Among the 721 respondents, 37.4% ($n = 249$) of current smokers were aware of e-cigs, 9.3% ($n = 48$) reported having ever tried or used e-cigs and 4.6% ($n = 24$) reported having used them in the previous six months. Among those who were aware of e-cigs, 44.4% ($n = 103$) believed they were less harmful than regular cigarettes (low perception of harmfulness). "Low perception of harmfulness" was associated with a higher educational level and with having recently tried/used e-cigs. Despite restrictions to e-cigs in Brazil, 4.6% of sample smokers reported having recently used them. Health surveillance programs in Brazil and other countries should include questions on use and perceptions of e-cigs considering their respective regulatory environments.

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