

QoN 014-02

Please explain your views regarding the claim used by ATHRA and others, declaring that vaping is '95% less harmful' than tobacco – particularly as it relates to a health claim.

Response: In our submission (#195) we addressed this explicitly, at length, on pages 20-22. In addition, author SC has published this paper Eissenberg T, Bhatnagar A, Chapman S, Jord S-E, Shihadeh AZ, Soule E. Invalidity of an oft-cited estimate of the relative harms of electronic cigarette. Am J Pub Health 2020; 110(2) 161-2. Full open-access text is available at <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305424>.

In that paper we concluded: “In sum, a 2013 evidence-lacking estimate of the harm of e-cigarettes relative to combustible cigarettes has been cited often. However, since 2013, e-cigarette devices and liquids have changed. Evidence of potential harm has accumulated. Therefore, the evidence-lacking estimate derived in 2013 cannot be valid today and should not be relied upon further. Future estimates of the harm of e-cigarettes should be based on the evidence that is now available and revised accordingly as more evidence accrues.

The “95% safer” estimate is a “factoid”: unreliable information repeated so often that it becomes accepted as fact. Public health practitioners, scientists, and physicians should expose the fragile status of the factoid emphatically by highlighting its unreliable provenance and its lack of validity today, noting the many changes in e-cigarette devices and liquids, the accumulation of evidence of potential harm, the increased prevalence of use, and the growing evidence that e-cigarette use is associated with subsequent cigarette smoking.”

We also note the summary in submission 405 from Blakeley et al that “...These studies suggest higher adverse impacts of vaping than the consensus reports (at the time of our previous analysis) that suggested vaping had only 5% of the harm of smoked tobacco. The results of this new analysis are currently under peer review, but we can say that the median health gain is now only about a quarter of that above, and uncertainty intervals now include the possibility of net harm to health.