



10 November 2023

Health threat from vaping reaches 'epidemic' levels among youth - doctor

Regulators' attempts to create a smoke-free New Zealand have allowed vaping to emerge as a public health threat which has now reached "epidemic" levels among youth, an anaesthesia conference has been told.

Taranaki-based anaesthetist Dr Trent Cutts was speaking at the Aotearoa NZ Anaesthesia ASM 2023 in Dunedin, and said the health sector was only now recognising the emerging threat of a low-regulation environment on vaping uptake.

"It's a push fuelled by recognition that our youth or rangatahi, in New Zealand haven't been considered enough in the strategy to make Aotearoa smoke-free.

"There's now without question a youth vaping epidemic around the world but particularly in New Zealand."

Dr Cutts highlighted differences between New Zealand and Australia, which he said employed some of the strictest vaping regulations in the world.

In particular, the two countries took different approaches to vaping promotion.

"In Australia, vaping nicotine liquid is by doctor's prescription only and it's illegal to possess any vaping product without a prescription – and the messaging from Australian health authorities is really heavy on the warnings.

"And then there's New Zealand where we've fully embraced vaping as a smoking cessation tool and it's been actively promoted. Devices are freely available and up until recently there's been few restrictions on flavours and nicotine strengths.

"The World Health Organization released a report that among other things looked at how different countries around the world were affected by vaping. Alarmingly, they singled out New Zealand as the country that has shown clear increase in use of nicotine and non-nicotine vaping products."

Data also showed New Zealand teenagers were not getting their vapes from specialist vape stores but from dairies, and were predominantly using products with high nicotine concentrations.

The main clinical evidence of the health impacts of vaping showed negative effects on respiratory and cardiovascular health.



Aotearoa NZ Anaesthesia
ASM 2023 | November 9 - 11
The Dunedin Centre, Otepoti

Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
5 Willeston Street, Wellington | www.anzca.edu.au

New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists
Level 1, 26 Brandon Street, Wellington | www.anaesthesia.nz

Additionally, there was an “unrecognised epidemic of trauma and burns” associated with malfunctioning vapes, mainly related to their batteries. Heating coils in vaping devices were a possible source of heavy metals and the composition of flavours was also of concern.

“Many of the flavours used in vaping devices have been deemed sufficiently safe based on oral ingestion rather than inhalation and the user remains very much in the dark about the specific chemicals used to make up the flavour,” Dr Cutts said.

Dr Cutts said some manufacturers of e-cigarettes had been shown to be unreliable in their ability to achieve accurate nicotine concentrations, and globally, cases of nicotine poisoning in children were on the rise.

“Nicotine exposure during adolescence can effect learning, memory and attention and it can increase the risk of future addiction to other drugs.”

The Aotearoa NZ Anaesthesia ASM 2023 runs until 11 November at The Dunedin Centre. The theme of this year’s conference is “Impact”, acknowledging the impact of Dunedin’s own Professor John Ritchie. Professor Ritchie was New Zealand’s first associate professor of anaesthesia, and made significant contributions to patient safety in anaesthesia and advancing the specialty and training.

The Aotearoa NZ Anaesthesia ASM 2023 is jointly convened by the New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists, the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, and the New Zealand Anaesthetic Technicians’ Society.

For more information on the Aotearoa NZ Anaesthesia ASM 2023 and to view the program, visit www.nzanaesthesia.com Please note, due to their sensitive nature, some sessions are closed to media.

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