

Nicotine and Military Fact Sheet

Summary: The Department of Defense does not endorse vaping or think it's a good thing. DOD spends billions of dollars a year on tobacco related medical and non-medical costs. They view E-cigarette and cigarette use as a military threat. Veterans who are dependent on nicotine are more likely to experience psychiatric and medical conditions including alcohol use disorder, depression, and PTSD. Veterans with depression or high levels of stress are more likely to subsequently use e-cigarettes to self-medicate, which provides short-term relief from symptoms but over time exacerbates the depressive or stress symptoms, perpetuating the use of nicotine. The majority of veterans who use nicotine want to quit.

The military has seen a rise in number of young adult e-cigarette users and consider this a problem. In a 2019 memo to all service members, the DOD director of disease prevention explains the known negative health effects of vaping and notes that, "Nicotine is highly addictive, and young adults and adolescents are especially vulnerable to its addictive properties". The Dept of VA affairs has an active multimodal support program designed to help veterans quit using tobacco. In their flyer they state that quitting leads to less anxiety and relief from PTSD symptoms, improved mood and quality of life, among other health benefits.

The US military has banned the sale of all vapes from their exchanges due to their potential harm. The military's goal is to minimize the use of vapes and points out that the effects of any of their own control programs will be reduced if community or societal postures are more permissive (ie, if it's easy to get vapes off-base). Unfortunately, Big Tobacco, continues aggressive predatory marketing practices directed at military personnel, namely "Juul's Heroes" and other military discounts. Big Tobacco has no intent to help service members quit smoking, only to get them hooked on vapes. Veterans deserve the highest quality medical and psychiatric care and support possible. Marketing highly addictive, harmful substances to our service members is simply unconscionable.

Last update 11/14/24

- The Department of Defense spends on average \$1.6 billion dollars a year on medical and non-medical costs related to tobacco use (CDC.gov)
 - Military is actively seeking ways to decrease smoking and tobacco use among its active service members and veterans
 - Tobacco use is a major health risk to service members, lowering physical fitness, increasing risk of injury during training, harming mental health
- Veterans with lifetime nicotine dependence are more likely to experience psychiatric and medical conditions (Baldassarri 2020)
 - More ND veterans screen positive for alcohol use disorder, depression and PTSD
 - More likely to report having chronic disease, including kidney disease, heart attacks, rheumatoid arthritis
 - Report lower physical functioning compared to veterans without nicotine dependence
- Seven out of 10 veterans who smoke want to quit
 - VA has multimodal quit smoking intervention program [How To Quit Smoking & Other Tobacco: Veteran Resources - Mental Health](#) [How To Quit Smoking & Other Tobacco: Veteran Resources - Mental Health](#)

- E-cigarette and cigarette use are considered threats to the US military (Keltner 2021)
 - E-cigarette and dual product use has increased in the US military, while combustible cigarette use has decreased (from 2011-2015)
 - E-cigarette use is higher in US military service members aged 17-24 than in general population
 - Cigarette, e-cig, dual product users are younger, lower educated, lower ranking, reported higher impulsivity and higher probable alcohol use disorder than non-users in the military
 - Military efforts to reduce electronic cigarette use must be aligned and integrated with community and societal efforts
 - Military control program effects will be reduced if community or societal postures are more permissive [in other words, the military values community programs that are more restrictive]
- Department of Defense has halted all sales of vapes in 2019 [Military Exchanges Extinguish Vape Sales > U.S. Department of Defense > Defense Department News](#) citing:
 - “vaping is not harmless.”
 - “The vapor contains ultrafine particles, carcinogens, volatile organic compounds and heavy metals.”
 - “Nicotine is highly addictive, and young adults and adolescents are especially vulnerable to its addictive properties”
- Big Tobacco has targeted members of the military, offering discounts to various e-cigarette products to service members (Fahey 2020)
 - Juul’s “Heroes” advertises e-cigarettes with endorsements from veterans, claims to support veterans service organizations, offers \$1 starter packs
 - Oct 13, 2024: Juul would like “to say thank you for your service by offering Military, Veterans, and first responders 25% off your next purchase!”
 - Military personnel have always been desirable to Big Tobacco b/c recruits are generally young adults, the highest risk period for tobacco initiation, offering Big Tobacco in individual’s life time of addiction and purchase of products
- Veterans with depression or high levels of stress are more likely to subsequently use e-cigarettes (Tran 2022)
 - Similar finding in non-military populations
 - Individuals with depression or stress use nicotine to self-medicate with nicotine which provides short-term relief from symptoms but over time exacerbates the depressive or stress symptoms, perpetuating the use of nicotine
 - These findings support use of mental health treatment programs for young adult veterans who use e-cigarettes
 - Such programs may help young adult veterans reduce their use of e-cigarettes and decrease negative health consequences of use
- Veterans treated for PTSD who have improvement of symptoms are more likely to quit smoking (Salas 2022)
 - Adults with PTSD are more likely to use tobacco and less likely to quit smoking
 - With PTSD improvement, veterans are more likely stop smoking independent of receiving smoking cessation therapy

- Also more likely to engage in healthy behaviors such as weight loss counseling, SUD treatment, antidepressant medication adherence
- US Dept of Veteran Affairs flyer on PTSD and Tobacco Use
https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/docs/PTSDandTobaccoUse_508.pdf
 - “Smoking may feel like it helps your alleviate stress, in the long run it can make your PTSD and stress symptoms worse”
 - Quitting will not make PTSD symptoms worse
 - Quitting will lead to:
 - Less anxiety and relief from PTSD symptoms
 - Improved mood and quality of life
 - Allow antidepressant meds to work best
 - Reduce risk of health problems related to smoking (cancer, COPD, heart and breathing issues)
- Strong policies have been enacted in all service branches to limit smoking and support smoking cessation
 - Smoking has been banned during basic training
 - Overarching principle that smoking has negative consequences on individuals and the military as a whole
 - Enforcement policies that addressed both military and civilian use of tobacco were identified as the strongest as use of tobacco by civilians on military installations has been cited as a challenge to tobacco control efforts

Sources

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