# Young people using e-cigarettes at rates higher than adults in many countries

23 May 2024 – Geneva / New York / Cairo – The World Health Organization (WHO) and STOP, a global tobacco industry watchdog, are launching today “Hooking the next generation,” a report highlighting how the tobacco and nicotine industry designs products, implements marketing campaigns and works to shape policy environments to help them addict the world’s youth.

This comes just ahead of World No Tobacco Day marked on 31 May, where WHO is amplifying the voices of young people who are calling on governments to protect them from being targets of the tobacco and nicotine industry.

The report shows that globally an estimated 37 million children aged 13–15 years use tobacco, and in many countries, the rate of e-cigarette use among adolescents exceeds that of adults. In the WHO European Region, 20% of 15-year-olds surveyed reported using e-cigarettes in the past 30 days.

The Global Youth Tobacco Surveys reveal alarming tobacco use rates in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region: in some countries up to 35% among boys and 30% among girls. Indeed, of all WHO regions, the Eastern Mediterranean Region has the highest average tobacco use rates for boys at rate of 15%.

It is also vital to address the high susceptibility to future tobacco use among adolescents who currently do not smoke. In some countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, up to around 30% of both boys and girls who have never used tobacco believe they can smoke in the future. As such, there is an urgent need for preventive strategies that target both current and potential users.

Despite significant progress in reducing tobacco use, the emergence of e-cigarettes and other new tobacco and nicotine products present a grave threat to youth and tobacco control. Studies demonstrate that e-cigarette use increases conventional cigarette use, particularly among non-smoking youth, by nearly three times.

"History is repeating, as the tobacco industry tries to sell the same nicotine to our children in different packaging," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. "These industries are actively targeting schools, children and young people with new products that are essentially a candy-flavoured trap. How can they talk about harm reduction when they are marketing these dangerous, highly-addictive products to children?"

These industries continue to market their products to young people with enticing flavours like candy and fruit. Research in the United States of America found that more than 70% of youth e-cigarette users would quit if the products were only available in tobacco flavour.

"These industries are intentionally designing products and utilizing marketing strategies that appeal directly to children," said Dr Ruediger Krech, Director, WHO Director of Health Promotion. "The use of child-friendly flavours like cotton candy and bubblegum, combined with sleek and colourful designs that resemble toys, is a blatant attempt to addict young people to these harmful products."

These deceptive tactics highlight the urgent need for strong regulations to protect young people from a lifetime of harmful dependence.

WHO urges governments to protect young people from the uptake of tobacco, e-cigarettes and other nicotine products by banning or tightly regulating these products. WHO recommendations include creating 100% smoke-free indoor public places, banning flavoured e-cigarettes, bans on marketing, advertising and promotion, higher taxes, increasing public awareness of the deceptive tactics used by the industry and supporting youth-led education and awareness initiatives.

"We must continue to protect our young people from the devastating consequences of tobacco and nicotine use," said Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. "The Eastern Mediterranean Region is not immune to tobacco industry activities and promotional tactics that target more children and young people to use its old and new products. I am noticing regularly that the new products are violating the laws of tobacco advertising and the sponsorship and promotion ban in the Region. We must stop these industry tactics and protect the children and young people of the Region."

“Addicted youth represent a lifetime of profits to the industry,” said Jorge Alday, Director, STOP at Vital Strategies. “That’s why the industry aggressively lobbies to create an environment that makes it cheap, attractive and easy for youth to get hooked. If policy makers don’t act, current and future generations may be facing a new wave of harms, characterized by addiction to and use of many tobacco and nicotine products, including cigarettes.”

Youth advocates around the world are taking a stand against the tobacco and nicotine industry’s destructive influence and manipulative marketing. They are exposing these deceptive practices and advocating for their own tobacco-free future. Youth organizations from around the world participated in the latest session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (COP10) to deliver a powerful message to policy makers: “Future generations will remember you as the ones who protected them or the ones who failed them and put them in danger.”

Dr Tedros recognized the following youth organizations among the 2024 World No Tobacco Day Awards:

Thailand Youth Institute, Kingdom of Thailand

Tobacco Abstinence Club, Federal Republic of Nigeria

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Argentine Republic

These inspiring young leaders are protecting their generation from an industry that sees them as profits, not people.

By working together, governments, public health organizations, civil society, and empowered youth can create a world where the next generation is free from the dangers of tobacco and nicotine addiction.

**Links**

https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-no-tobacco-day/2024

https://fctc.who.int/newsroom/news/item/10-02-2024-cop10-adopted-historic-decisions-to-protect-the-environment-from-the-harms-of-tobacco-and-to-address-cross-border-tobacco-advertising-promotion-and-sponsorship-and-the-depiction-of-tobacco-in-entertainment-media

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