

Trust in E-cigarette safety varies by worldview, source of messaging

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Credit: Georgia State University

Public health messaging about the safety of e-cigarettes needs to account for the worldviews of the target audience, with different groups displaying varying levels of trust depending on the source of the message, according to a recent study by the School of Public Health at Georgia State University.

Researchers at the school's Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science (TCORS) assessed cultural worldviews along two dimensions: hierarchy-egalitarianism (attitudes toward authority and power) and individualism-communitarianism (focus on self-reliance or responsibility to a larger group) of more than 5,000 [people](#) who reported an awareness of electronic nicotine devices (ENDS), which include e-cigarettes.

While people tended to trust health sources, but not tobacco or vapor company sources, the researchers found those with individualistic and hierarchical worldviews "were less trusting of health experts, the Centers for Disease Control

and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and were more trusting of tobacco and vapor manufacturers."

As the authors noted, the same message about the potential risks or benefits of e-cigarettes may have "different, opposing or unintended effects on individuals' risk-benefit perceptions depending on their worldviews."

The authors found that worldviews and whom people trust for information about e-cigarettes were associated with their perceptions of risk of and whether they used e-cigarettes.

Results of the study, which used data from the 2015 Tobacco Products and Risk Perceptions Survey, are published in an article titled "Worldviews and trust of [sources](#) for [health](#) information on electronic nicotine delivery systems: Effects on risk perceptions and Use," published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine: Population Health*.

The authors recommend additional research to determine which types of communication strategies are most effective in conveying risk to different groups of people. They also suggest that researchers explore "how people perceive the credibility of the source" for "modified risk" messages that say an [e-cigarette](#) product has fewer toxins or is less harmful than traditional cigarettes, which [tobacco](#) and vapor companies can place on product packaging with FDA approval.

More information: Scott R. Weaver et al. Worldviews and trust of sources for health information on electronic nicotine delivery systems: Effects on risk perceptions and Use, *SSM - Population Health* (2017). DOI: [10.1016/j.ssmph.2017.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2017.09.003)

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