



WVU Health News



Experts say new tobacco product targets young adults

Camel Snus spitless tobacco called 'highly addicting'

Editors and reporters: Call the HSC News Office to schedule interviews with Tworek or Anderson -- 304-293-7087.

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. – New research at West Virginia University is examining whether a smokeless, spitless tobacco product aimed at young adults is catching on. And the researchers have found that RJ Reynolds' Camel Snus – touted as a socially acceptable way to satisfy addiction – contains surprisingly high levels of nicotine.

“Camel Snus contains more nicotine than most other snuff products,” said Bruce Adkins of the state Division of Tobacco Prevention in Charleston. “In fact, the Camel Snus currently being marketed in West Virginia contains double the nicotine of an earlier tested version sold elsewhere in the United States. This provides a new example of the tobacco companies' manipulating nicotine levels without informing consumers.”

“West Virginia has extremely high rates of smokeless tobacco use and high rates of smoking,” said Cindy Tworek, Ph.D., a member of WVU's Translational Tobacco Reduction Research Program (T2R2). “It would appear that tobacco companies are trying to strategically market new smokeless, spitless tobacco products in these areas of high use, such as West Virginia, and also promoting their use as a way to get nicotine in places where you can't smoke.” T2R2 is a joint effort of the Mary Babb Randolph Cancer Center at WVU and the West Virginia Prevention Research Center.

Tworek is conducting a survey of several hundred young adults on or around college campuses in West Virginia to see whether the product's marketing has scored a hit. She hopes to have results compiled early in 2009.

Snus comes in a pouch that is placed between the gum and the upper lip. Because of low salt and moisture content, users don't have to spit. “It's a pouch you put in your mouth and you basically just let it sit there and absorb,” she said. “You are supposed to be able to swallow the juice so you don't spit.”

Tworek first noticed Camel Snus in a Morgantown gas station's convenience store, colorfully packaged in a refrigerated display case, and sporting youth-pleasing flavors such as frost and spice.

“Given West Virginia’s high smoking rates, plus the fact that West Virginia has the highest rate of spit tobacco in the country among adult men, it makes sense that Morgantown became a test market for Camel Snus,” she said. “Packaging, colors, and advertising have potential to appeal to a younger audience, including product pamphlets on where you can use Camel Snus. The ‘spitless’ nature of the product would also seem more attractive to women vs. other more traditional forms of smokeless tobacco, like chew or snuff.”

The product’s nicotine level is also an issue. To study nicotine and other chemicals in snus, the Division of Tobacco Prevention partnered with Tworek and Robert H. Anderson, deputy director of the WVU Prevention Research Center in the WVU Department of Community Medicine.

“Our research shows that nicotine levels in Camel Snus are stronger than levels in several snuff products sold in the United States,” Anderson said. Previous data suggested that snus products being test-marketed in the United States were weak in nicotine, the authors wrote in a study presented for publication in an upcoming issue of the state’s medical journal.

In contrast, the research findings indicate that the version of Camel Snus currently being sold in West Virginia has double the nicotine compared to an earlier analysis of a test-market version of the same product.

“With nicotine levels this high, these products are going to be highly addicting. The public needs this awareness, especially to remind them that there’s no tobacco product that can be used without significant potential health risks,” Adkins said.

Anderson added, “We think the target market for snus includes youth – the same way the tobacco companies have marketed to young people for decades. Kids could use it in schools, and teachers wouldn’t even know.”

Tests showed another brand of snus – the Liggett Group’s Tourney products – to be much lower in nicotine than Camel Snus.

“Tobacco manufacturers manipulate nicotine levels in snus and can do so even within a brand’s flavors,” the authors wrote. “Furthermore, they can do this without disclosing this information to consumers.”

The study notes the tobacco industry’s long history of developing and marketing products that purport to be less harmful than other products. But the researchers said they cannot confirm snus as a safe alternative to smoking, even though the product qualifies as a PREP, or Potential Reduced Exposure Product. (PREPs are not evaluated for safety by the government.)

“Snus products have not been tested in terms of long-term safety, to know whether it’s accurate to market them as a health-safe alternative to smoking,” Tworek said.



For information on the potential health effects of snus see <http://www.ufsc.ufl.edu/Patient/cancernews.aspx?section=cancernews&id=40030>.

For information on the Translational Tobacco Reduction Research Program (T2R2) see <http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/mbrcc/t2r2/>.

For information on the Division of Tobacco Prevention see <http://www.wvntp.org/>.

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