Most e-cigarette searches not aimed at smoking cessation
by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

People searching the internet for information about e-cigarettes and vaping seemed more interested in purchasing products than learning about health risks or smoking cessation, a new study found.

"The e-cigarette industry, the media, and the vaping community have promoted the notion that e-cigarettes are an effective device for quitting smoking, yet what we're seeing is that there are very few people searching for information about that," senior author Rebecca S. Williams, M.H.S., Ph.D., researcher at the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center and Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, said in a news release.

Researchers analyzed data from Google searches in the U.S. from 2009 to 2015 that included terms related to electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS). In 2014 alone, there were nearly 8.5 million such searches.

The team found rapidly increasing numbers of vaping searches in 2014 while e-cigarette searches declined. Vaping refers to use of products that aerosolize nicotine, which includes e-cigarettes.

In 2013, about 6% of ENDS searches were related to buying products, 3% were related to health risks and 0.3% were related to smoking cessation. In 2014, ENDS shopping-related searches almost doubled. That year, 11% of the searches were related to purchasing, 2% were related to health risks and 0.2% were related to smoking cessation.

Authors called for additional health campaigns to help people understand the risks of ENDS.

"Tobacco control has historically lagged behind online tobacco markets, leaving gaps in surveillance," Dr. Williams said in the release. "Nowhere is this clearer than with the rise of ENDS. ENDS have become popular during a period without strong surveillance and a slowed public health reaction. Innovative methods like search query surveillance can improve the timeliness of tobacco control surveillance, especially around ENDS."