

HEALTH

No Smoke, but Haze Around E-Joint

By KIRA PEIKOFF JAN. 12, 2015

At a recent Seahawks football game in Seattle, Shy Sadis, 41, took a drag on a slim vapor pen that looked like a jet black Marlboro. The tip glowed red as he inhaled.

But the pen contained no nicotine. Instead, it held 250 milligrams of cannabis oil loaded with THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana.

“Nobody noticed,” said Mr. Sadis, who owns several marijuana dispensaries in Washington State. “You pull it out of your pocket, take a hit like a cigarette, put it back, and you’re done. It’s so discreet.”

The device, called a JuJu Joint, heralds a union that seems all but inevitable: marijuana and the e-cigarette, together at last in an e-joint. For years, people have been stuffing marijuana in various forms into portable vaporizers and into the cartridges of e-cigarettes. But the JuJu Joint is disposable, requires no charging of batteries or loading of cartridges, and comes filled with 150 hits. You take it out of the package and put it to your lips — that’s it. There is no smoke and no smell.

Since their introduction in April, 75,000 JuJu Joints have been sold in Washington State, where marijuana is recreationally and medically legal. The maker says that 500,000 will be sold this year and that there are plans to expand to Colorado, where recreational use is legal, Oregon, where it will be legal in July, and to Nevada, where it is decriminalized.

“I wanted to eliminate every hassle that has to do with smoking marijuana,” said Rick Stevens, 62, the inventor and co-founder of JuJu Joints with Marcus Charles, a Seattle entrepreneur. “I wanted it to be discreet and

easy for people to handle. There's no odor, matches or mess.”

Not everyone is so enthusiastic. Many addiction researchers fear that e-cigarettes will pave the way to reliance on actual cigarettes, especially in teenagers. And THC adversely affects the developing brain, some studies have found, impairing attention and memory in adolescents and exacerbating psychiatric problems.

“In some ways, e-joints are a perfect storm of a problematic delivery system, the e-cigarette, and in addition a problematic substance, cannabis oil,” said Dr. Petros Levounis, the chairman of the psychiatry department at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School.

Each JuJu Joint contains 100 milligrams of THC, twice as much as a traditional joint, as well as propylene glycol, a chemical normally used to absorb water in foods and cosmetics, said Suchitra Krishnan-Sarin, an associate professor of psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine.

“We do not know the effects of inhaling constant doses of this agent,” she said. “We know very little about these products and what they contain.”

Mr. Stevens, a former marketing executive who spent 30 years in the tobacco industry, defended the device's THC content, pointing out that each inhalation is metered by the device.

“Our goal is not to get people stoned so they sit in the corner and vegetate,” he said.

Local retailers report that JuJu Joints are catching on, especially with women and consumers in their 40s to 60s. “You wouldn't believe the demographic this has opened up,” said Ed Vallejo, 60, a manager at New Vansterdam, a recreational store in Vancouver, Wash. “This is the older, retired set. The younger set can't afford it.”

JuJu Joints for recreational use cost \$65 to \$100 each, 25 percent of which goes to the state's Liquor Control Board. It costs a suggested donation of \$25 at medical dispensaries. Purchasers must be at least 21.

“The underlying reason people buy it is because of its design and because you can smoke it in public,” said Lindsay Middleton, 21, a bud-tender at Green Lady Marijuana, a recreational store in Olympia. Though smoking marijuana

in public is illegal, customers report using JuJu Joints while skiing, hiking and going to concerts.

Law enforcement agencies are concerned that discreet vapor pens filled with cannabis oil are already being abused by teenagers, and that many are sure to lay hands on JuJu Joints.

“If you go on Instagram, you will find hundreds of thousands of postings by kids on how they are using variants of e-cigarettes, or e-cigarettes themselves, to smoke pot in the presence of their parents and at school, and getting by,” said Barbara Carreno, a spokeswoman for the Drug Enforcement Administration.

According to the latest Monitoring the Future Survey, an annual study of 40,000 teenagers conducted by the University of Michigan and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014 marked the first year that more teenagers used e-cigarettes than traditional ones.

The study also found that in the past year, 35.1 percent of 12th graders consumed marijuana, making it the most common illicit drug among high school seniors.

But users of medical marijuana may prove to be the largest market for e-joints. The Food and Drug Administration recognizes no legitimate medical use, and there is little high-quality research backing marijuana as a remedy for the scores of conditions for which it is being used.

A few studies, however, suggest ingredients in marijuana may help relieve pain and improve appetite in patients with cancer, AIDS and multiple sclerosis. Some researchers argue that marijuana — especially in the form of nebulized vapor — could be found beneficial to even more patients, if the federal government loosened research restrictions.

“There may be and probably is a legitimate medical use for vaping cannabis, but we need to do the research to figure out if it’s true and to find out the dosing,” said Otis Brawley, the chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society. “But with marijuana being a Schedule 1 drug, it’s so onerous to get the licensure that many people actually skilled to do the research just choose not to.”

Mr. Stevens is developing a JuJu Joint that contains only cannabidiol, or CBD, a nonpsychoactive extract of marijuana that advocates say can prevent seizures. This version contains less than 0.3 percent THC, so it would be legal nationwide.

“This day and age, everybody has a vapor pen,” Mr. Sadis said. “You don’t know if they’re smoking marijuana or nicotine.”

Correction: January 12, 2015

An earlier version of this article misstated the name of the government entity for whom Barbara Carreno is a spokeswoman. It is the Drug Enforcement Administration, not the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Correction: January 16, 2015

An article on Tuesday about electronic vapor marijuana cigarettes referred imprecisely to the legality of recreational use of marijuana in Oregon. While the state passed a ballot measure in November to allow the personal use and possession of recreational marijuana, it does not go into effect until July 1, 2015.

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