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**EVOLIUCINĖ MEDICINA:
ŽMOGAUS RAIDOS PERSPEKTYVOS IR SVEIKATA
BESIKEIČIANČIOJE APLINKOJE**

**EVOLUTIONARY MEDICINE:
PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH
CONSEQUENCES IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT**

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Vilniaus universiteto Medicinos ir sveikatos mokslų
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ELECTRONIC CIGARETTE USAGE FREQUENCY AND PERCEIVED DEPENDENCY AS PREDICTORS FOR XEROSTOMIA

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Background and Aim: Across Europe, electronic cigarettes (EC) are growing in popularity as an alternative to traditional tobacco products. EC aerosol contains propylene glycol, causing dry mouth which promotes tooth decay, gum disease, and other oral health issues. This study aimed to evaluate the association between EC usage frequency, perceived dependency level, and self-reported xerostomia among Vilnius University students.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in 2025–2026 among 148 Vilnius University students (convenience sample) using an anonymous, test-retest validated 20-item questionnaire (intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC)=0.920). EC usage frequency (0=non-user; 1=<1-5 uses/day; 2=>6-20 uses/day) and perceived dependency level (0=never used; 1=former user; 2=current user who believes they could quit; 3=current user who cannot quit) were encoded ordinally. Xerostomia frequency (never / sometimes / often / always) was used as a dependent variable. Descriptive statistics, Spearman rank correlation were applied; $p < 0.05$ indicated statistical significance.

Results: Of 148 respondents 70.9% (N=105) were female, median age was 20 years (sd=2.1), and 35.1% (N=52) were EC users. While 9.4% of non-users experienced xerostomia often, 62.5% sometimes, and 28.1% never, the corresponding rates among EC users were 15.4%, 69.2%, and 15.4%. Perceived EC vaping dependency level was significantly correlated with xerostomia frequency ($p=0.212$; $p=0.010$), as was EC usage frequency ($p=0.167$; $p=0.042$).

Conclusions: Both EC usage frequency and perceived dependency level were significantly associated with xerostomia. Perceived dependency was the stronger predictor, suggesting that addiction depth — not only usage intensity — contributes to dry mouth risk. These findings highlight the need for dental professionals to assess EC use frequency and dependency when screening for xerostomia in young patients.

Keywords: dependency, electronic cigarettes, students, xerostomia