

Clerk to panel on Health Services
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

8th April 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: To implement total ban of electronic cigarette and any other form of alternative smoking product. Impose, Smoking (Public health) (Amendment) Bill 2019

I have been working as a Community health Officer for Smoking Cessation programme under United Christian Nethersole Community Health Services from past more than 4 years. In addition I am also a concerned mother of a teenager growing in Hong Kong. In our programme we have helped numerous of Hong Kong residents to quit smoking and lead a healthy lifestyle. We have dealt with various age groups and diverse ethnicities.

In our smoking cessation programme we have observed an upsurge from 3% to 7% of people who have used electronic cigarettes. Some made attempts to quit smoking with the help of e-cig but have been disappointed and unsuccessful to quit.

The youth age group is the most susceptible to threats of electronic cigarette and nicotine addiction. There is a mounting evidence that alternative smoking devices damage health, are highly addictive and act as “one way bridge” to combustible cigarette smoking

The Secondary School Smoking Survey 2012/13 conducted by the School of Public Health of The University of Hong Kong reported that e-cigarette users were more likely to smoke conventional cigarettes. Starting at a very tender age they are more likely to have respiratory symptoms such as cough and phlegm. The report also emphasized that majority of the current e-cigarette users were never cigarette smokers or experimenters, suggesting that e-cigarettes appeal to non-cigarette smokers.

Similarly according to the Thematic Household Survey Report No. 64, the prevalence of e-cigarette use among primary school students and secondary school students were 1.4% and 8.7% respectively.

Furthermore, e-cigarettes are not emission-free and their pollutants could be of health concern for users and secondhand smokers, especially if it's being used inside the home. And owing to small housing spaces in Hong Kong, smoking any kind of combustible or alternative smoking product within the confines of home can be dangerous.

In the wake of the fact that there is limited research on developing of the e-cig, some have been reported to have blown up due to poor manufacturing quality. A large majority of the people consuming e-cigarettes probably don't even know what they are consuming.

We must embrace our responsibility to protect and inculcate healthy habits in our future generations, therefore it becomes imperative to ask for an immediate ban on sale of e-cig, heat not burn and other alternative smoking products that claim they are a "healthier" alternative. These products are 'normalising' smoking and leading to a new generation of nicotine addicts. Both tobacco interventions and the school programs must target the full array of tobacco products and not just cigarettes in order to denormalise the use of all tobacco products.

Keeping in mind the above we strongly urge the Government and the decision-makers to recognise the growing public health threat that e-cigarettes pose before it turn into a youth vaping epidemic. Policies prohibiting e-cigarette sales (including nicotine-free e-cigarettes) to minors may help prevent the uptake in adolescents, hence creating a healthier future generation. Hong Kong should follow the example of countries like Singapore and Brazil who have already banned e-cigarettes.

Lastly we urge the Government and the Legislative councilors to put forward long term and comprehensive tobacco control policies to prevent health risks and promote healthy and smoke/vape free Hong Kong.

Thank you very much.

Yours Sincerely

Bulbul Sharma

Community Health Officer

Smoking Cessation Programme for Ethnic Minorities and New Immigrants

United Christian Nethersole Community Health Service.