

Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health
Support the Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Bill 2019
Prohibit the Import, Manufacture, Sale, Distribution and Advertisement of
E-cigarettes and Other Alternative Smoking Products

Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health (COSH) advocates the Government to adopt long-term and comprehensive policies in tobacco control, in order to reduce smoking and safeguard public health. In recent years, COSH expresses serious concern about the growing popularity of alternative smoking products included e-cigarette and heat-not-burn tobacco products, and worries about the health risks and challenges toward tobacco control. Therefore, COSH supports the Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Bill 2019 to prohibit the import, manufacture, sale, distribution and advertisement of alternative smoking products and urge Legislative Council to pass the bill as soon as possible.

Prevent these products from being a gateway to youth smoking

The marketing strategies of e-cigarettes, heat-not-burn tobacco products and other alternative smoking products are targeting non-smokers, particularly the youngsters, which promote and encourage tobacco use. These products are marketed as trendy items with novel design and packaging, and over 10,000 flavours, making it appealing to the youth and serving the gateway to smoking. Most of these products do not provide details on their ingredients but only address the variety of flavours. They are marketed as non-addictive, healthier products which mislead consumers on their safety and attract youngsters to try, which aim to promote and renormalize the smoking behaviour.

The gateway effect of alternative smoking products on youth smoking has already been proven by local and foreign research findings. Report of the World Health Organization and research conducted in different regions consistently showed that that e-cigarette use is associated with future smoking^{1,2,3,4,5}. A large-scale systematic

¹ World Health Organization (2016). Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Electronic Non-Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS/ENNDS). Paper for the 7th Session of Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Delhi, India, 7-12 November 2016.

² East K, Hitchman S C, Bakolis I, et al. (2018) The Association Between Smoking and Electronic Cigarette Use in a Cohort of Young People. *Journal of Adolescent Health Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 2018:539-547

³ Lin X, Parascandola M, Wang C, Jiang Y (2018). Perception and Current Use of E-cigarettes Among Youth in China. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, 2018, 1-7. doi:10.1093/ntr/nty145

⁴ Fulton E, Gokal K, Griffiths S, Wild S (2018). More than half of adolescent e-cigarette users had never smoked a cigarette: findings from a study of school children in the UK. *Public Health*, Vol 161, August 2018, p.33-35 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.04.014>

review published in the US in 2018 also pointed out that that the use of e-cigarettes would increase the risk of using conventional tobacco products among young people⁶. According to the survey conducted by the School of Public Health of The University of Hong Kong, for those who had ever tried cigarettes and e-cigarette, 73% of them tried e-cigarettes first. The findings indicate that e-cigarettes and other alternative smoking products could be the gateway to youth smoking.

Not a legitimate tool for smoking cessation

According to the World Health Organization, evidence of e-cigarettes and other alternative smoking products on smoking cessation is limited and not conclusive. These products are not the legitimate tool for quitting smoking. On the contrary, some smokers may switch to these products instead of quitting smoking. Numerous research evidences have already refuted the argument that the use of alternative smoking products can help quit smoking. According to the research conducted by The University of Hong Kong, there is no statistically significant difference of the quit rate between those respondents who had used e-cigarette and those had not. The results showed that successful quit rate of ever e-cigarette users was 13.4% while that of never e-cigarette users was 20.8%. It indicates that e-cigarettes and alternative smoking products cannot enhance smoking cessation⁷.

In addition, research indicates that most e-cigarette users did not quit smoking completely. A study in the US found that about three-quarters of e-cigarette users were dual users⁸ of conventional cigarettes. Another study in the US published in 2017 found that the use of e-cigarette leads to higher possibility to become dual users, greater nicotine dependence and hence harder to quit⁹. Statement of European Respiratory Society also pointed out that there may be a risk that smokers will switch to heat-not-burn tobacco products instead of quitting¹⁰.

⁵ Hammond D, Reid J, Cole A, Leatherdale S (2017). Electronic cigarette use and smoking among youth: a longitudinal cohort study. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 2017 October 30;189:E1328-36. doi:10.1503/cmaj.161002

⁶ Glantz S, Bareham D (2018). E-Cigarettes: Use, Effects on Smoking, Risks, and Policy Implications. *Annual Review of Public Health* 2018. 39:28.1-28.21. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040617-013757>

⁷ Wu SY, Wang MP, Li WH, Kwong AC, Lai VW, Lam TH. (2018). Does Electronic Cigarette Use Predict Abstinence from Conventional Cigarettes among Smokers in Hong Kong? *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2018;15(3).

⁸ King B, Patel R, Nguyen K, Dube S (2015). Trends in awareness and use of electronic cigarettes among US adults, 2010-2013. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* (17-2), p.219-227. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntu191>

⁹ Bowler, Russell P et al. "Electronic Cigarette Use in US Adults at Risk for or with COPD: Analysis from Two Observational Cohorts." *Journal of general internal medicine* vol. 32,12 (2017): 1315-1322. doi:10.1007/s11606-017-4150-7

¹⁰ European Respiratory Society. (2018). ERS position paper on heated tobacco products. Retrieved from <https://www.ersnet.org/the-society/news/ers-position-paper-on-heated-tobacco-products>

Pose risks to health, no safe and harmless tobacco product

The tobacco industry and the related sectors claimed that e-cigarettes, heat-not-burn tobacco products and other alternative smoking products are “healthier products” and “aids for smoking cessation”. These claims are groundless, and aim to mislead consumers on the safety, downplay the health risks associated with smoking, attract non-smokers to try and hinder smokers to quit any form of tobacco craving. The tobacco industry has long history of using misleading and distorted data to conceal the harms of smoking and obstruct the effective tobacco control policy. We must be cautious with the “scientific evidence” provided by the industry.

We have to emphasize that there is no safe and harmless tobacco product in the world. E-cigarettes, heat-not-burn tobacco products and other alternative smoking products release various detrimental and carcinogenic substances. Some of the toxins and carcinogens have no safe level and will harm our health. In fact, many experts and scholars in public health have already refuted the argument that e-cigarettes are less risky than traditional cigarettes. This argument is not supported by scientific evidence, not credible and is misleading¹¹.

Increasing number of research studies uncovered the severe health impact of using these products. Researches revealed that e-cigarettes contain toxic chemical substances like propylene glycol, glycerin and carcinogens such as formaldehyde and acetaldehyde which can bring huge health risks to human. E-cigarettes other alternative smoking products are not healthier alternative to smoking. The high health risks of e-cigarette use have been reported in many studies, such as heart attack, coronary artery disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchiolitis obliterans, respiratory diseases, seizure and damages to cells and DNA, etc.

The research conducted by the tobacco industry, claiming that heat-not-burn tobacco products are less harmful, are susceptible. Reuters’ report revealed that results of the studies were manipulated by the tobacco industry and hence not trustworthy¹². Independent research showed that high concentration of harmful chemicals are found in heat-not-burn tobacco products and bring immense health risks, such as tar,

¹¹ Wright, C. T. (2019). E-cigarettes are creating a generation of nicotine addicts, top scientists warn. Retrieved from

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/03/01/e-cigarettes-creating-generation-nicotine-addicts-top-scientists/>

¹² Reuters (20 December 2017). The Philip Morris Files Part 3: Scientist describe problems in Philip Morris e-cigarette experiments. Retrieved from

<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/tobacco-iqos-science/>

nicotine, acrolein, and carcinogenic acrylamide, formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, benzaldehyde and tobacco-specific nitrosamines (TSNAs), etc. Moreover, the report published by the Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety in 2018 found that heat-not-burn tobacco products contain carcinogens commonly found in traditional cigarettes, and the amount of tar released in heat-not-burn cigarettes is similar to traditional cigarettes, and so is the nicotine content. Heat-not-burn tobacco products have been launched in the market for just some years but overseas studies have already proved the link between the products and impaired lung function and damages to respiratory systems and airway. The scientific committee of US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended to reject the claim of heat-not-burn tobacco products as modified risk products¹³. In addition, the statement of European Respiratory Society clearly set out that heat-not-burn tobacco products remain both harmful and highly addictive.

Regulatory approach can't prevent its epidemic

Overseas experiences showed that regulatory approach on e-cigarettes and other alternative smoking products is not able to prevent its epidemic among youngsters. For instance, in the US, e-cigarettes are only allowed to sell to persons aged 18 or above. However, the e-cigarette use among the youth in the US is continuously increasing. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 3.6 million middle and high school students were currently using e-cigarettes in 2018. E-cigarette use among high school students had raised almost 14 times, from 1.5% in 2011 to 20.8% in 2018. FDA described that e-cigarettes had become an epidemic, and a ubiquitous and dangerous trend among teens. The disturbing and accelerating trajectory of use in youth and the resulting path to addiction must end.

“Total ban” is supported by the public overwhelmingly

Banning alternative smoking products totally is widely supported by different community sectors and the general public in Hong Kong. COSH, together with 28 tobacco control groups, academia, medical and healthcare professionals, parents and education sector, youth and social service organizations, patient groups and other sectors has expressed support to the amendment bill and urged the Legislative Council to pass the bill as soon as possible. Survey of The Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society,

¹³ LaVito, A. (Ed.). (26 January 2018). In high-stakes votes, FDA advisors say evidence doesn't back Philip Morris' claims. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/25/philip-morris-stock-falls-as-committee-reviews-iqos-claims.html>

Kowloon showed that youngsters (90%) overwhelmingly support the ban of all alternative smoking products. The parent survey conducted by the Federations of Parent-teacher Associations showed that 75% of parents supported a total ban on e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn tobacco products, in which nearly 60% of smokers also supported. In addition, COSH has collected 70,000 signatures from the public to support the total ban on e-cigarette and other alternative smoking products. All of the above shown the amendment bill is generally supported by the public.

The epidemic of e-cigarette and other alternative smoking products should not be underestimated. According to the survey conducted by the School of Public Health, The University of Hong Kong, ever use of e-cigarettes among primary 2 to primary 4 students increased from 2.9% in 2016-2017 to 4.5% in 2017-2018, which surged by 55%. Consumer Council conducted a survey in December 2018 and found that these alternative smoking products were selling in malls selling trendy novelties, mobile phones and computer products, which youths easily interacted and purchased¹⁴. With reference to the experiences of the US and European countries, regulatory approach or delay in legislation may cause a surge in the market and ruin tobacco control efforts.

To protect the health of the public, especially the next generations, the Government and Legislative Council should pass the bill to ban e-cigarettes, heat-not-burn tobacco products, herbal cigarettes and other alternative smoking products as soon as possible, so as to prevent them from becoming the gateway to smoking and avoid the current and future health risks posed by the tobacco epidemic. COSH also advocates to take a bold step to formulate a goal and timeline for the total ban of all tobacco products.

¹⁴ Consumer Council. (2018). Sale of e-Cigarettes and New Tobacco Products in Shopping Malls – Urgent Call for Full Ban for Health Protection. Retrieved from https://www.consumer.org.hk/ws_en/news/press/506/e-cigarettes.html