

MALAYSIA

Benefits of vaping illusory, says Malaysian Medical Association

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Vaping has become a popular social activity in recent years. Doctors claim that arguments stating vape liquid uses 'safe' substances did not hold water as food additives may pose a danger when taken as inhalants. - The Malaysian Insider file pic, November 21, 2015.

The health benefits of e-cigarettes, or vaping, are either limited or illusory, while the potential ill-effects are very real, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) warned today, even as pro-vaping groups hit out at Putrajaya for clamping down on the mushrooming industry.

MMA president Dr Ashok Zachariah Philip said it supported the Health Ministry's initiatives against vaping, given the repercussions the new trend could have on public health.

He also stressed the lack of long-term or conclusive studies on the alleged positive benefits of vaping as an alternative to smoking.

"What are the health issues? Firstly, e-cigarettes have not been around long enough for anyone to claim with certainty that they are safe for long-term use," wrote Dr Philip in a statement.

He said long term damage to the organs could take up to 20 years to develop, and it would be difficult to study the impact of vaping since many had smoked, or continued to smoke, cigarettes.

Claims that vaping was more effective than conventional therapy in helping smokers quit also required randomised double-blind studies, Dr Philip added.

Research claiming e-cigarettes were 95% safer than cigarettes also required more study, he said, while 5% of the harm caused by cigarettes "is not trivial".

"If e-cigarettes were used purely for smoking cessation, a case could be made for saying that they are reducing harm. However, many people who now vape have never smoked before," said Dr Philip.

He said arguments that the vape liquid contained only "safe" substances also did not hold water, as the food additives may pose a danger when taken as inhalants.

"To take a well-known example, people who try the 'cinnamon challenge' quickly realise that cinnamon, delicious when taken orally, is a serious irritant when inhaled.

"The harmlessness of all these additives must be studied and confirmed before claims are made," he said.

Dr Philip added that any drug could be added to the liquid, and it could seriously hamper attempts to curtail illicit drug use.

The health ministry recently proposed to limit the sale of e-cigarettes by allowing only licensed pharmacists and registered medical practitioners to sell nicotine-laced vaping liquids.

The move has come under criticism from consumers as well as several ministers. – November 21, 2015.

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