

Putrajaya urged to explain delay in gazetting regulations for e-cigarettes, vape products

BY LIM HOW PIM ON JUNE 30, 2024, SUNDAY AT 3:23 PM **SARAWAK**

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A man smokes an e-cigarette in this file photo. – AFP Photo

KUCHING (June 30): The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has urged the government to speed up the gazetting of the regulations for e-cigarettes and vape products.

Its president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said the delay in gazetting regulations has led to significant public health risks, allowing the vaping industry to exploit regulatory gaps.

“We have been informed that the draft of the regulations was already completed since the end of last year but there has been no news about it since. The government must explain the reasons for this delay,” he said in a statement.

Dr Azizan said it is troubling to hear that 111 cases of exposure to questionable vape liquid were reported to the National Poison Centre between 2015 and last year.

He said this was apart from the reported cases of e-cigarette and vape associated lung injury (EVALI), some of which cases involved minors as was recently revealed in Parliament.

“In the absence of enforced regulations, we have observed a troubling trend where mobile vape kiosks are being set up around universities and schools.

“These kiosks not only sell vaping products but also promote vaping as a lifestyle choice to young people, leading to early nicotine addiction and normalisation of vaping,” he said.

He pointed out that the decision by the government to remove nicotine from the Poisons Act almost 15 months ago, without promptly gazetting the necessary tobacco control regulations, is highly irresponsible.

According to him, this move has ignored the government’s duty to protect public health and been seen by the public as favouring commercial interests over the well-being of the young people.

He said the surge in vaping among youths has profound implications for public health given that early nicotine addiction not only poses severe health risks but also necessitates intensive behavioural management.

“Nicotine addiction affects the brain, altering behaviour and cravings, making it challenging to quit once addiction sets in. If left unaddressed, the current exposure to vaping among youth will complicate the management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the future, burdening the healthcare system, reducing productivity and imposing socio-economic strains on families and the nation,” he said.

Given these pressing concerns, he called upon the government to expedite the gazettelement of the regulations under the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024.

Dr Azizan said the government should restrict the sale and promotion of vaping products near educational institutions to prevent the targeting of youth by the vaping industry.

He also suggested to implement stringent advertising and packaging regulations to reduce the appeal of vaping products to minors.

In addition, he called for strict enforcement to curb illegal sales and marketing practices, ensuring that vaping products are inaccessible to those under the age of 18.

“We call for a coordinated effort involving the Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. This multi-ministerial collaboration is essential to effectively protect our young from the dangers of vaping,” he said.

Dr Azizan also appealed to MPs to take a strong stance on this critical issue by pressuring the government to finalise and implement these regulations swiftly.

He opined that MPs can play a vital role in safeguarding the future of the younger generation.

“The health and well-being of our youth should be a top priority, transcending political and commercial interests. We look forward to the support of all MPs in addressing this urgent matter and stand ready to collaborate on initiatives aimed at curbing the spread of vaping and protecting our youth from its harmful effects,” he added.