

# MMA Dissatisfied With MOH's Explanation On Nicotine Exemption

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MMA says Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa told health groups that she had signed off on the delisting of liquid nicotine with a “heavy heart” for the vape tax. “We have heard the ministry’s explanation and still do not find the reasons given acceptable.”



Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa speaks at a briefing on April 6, 2023, for the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA), the Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control (MCTC), the National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM), and the Malaysian Pharmacists Society (MPS) on the exemption of liquid nicotine from the Poisons Act 1952. Photo from Dr Zaliha Mustafa's Facebook page.

KUALA LUMPUR, April 8 – The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has rejected the Ministry of Health’s (MOH) explanation on the removal of liquid nicotine from control under the Poisons Act 1952.

In a strongly-worded statement, the doctors’ group said that at a meeting last Thursday, Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa explained that liquid nicotine was removed from the Poisons List to enable the taxation of e-cigarette and vape liquids with nicotine from last April 1.

“During the meeting, the Health Minister admitted that it is not the ideal scenario given that the Control of Tobacco Product and Smoking Bill 2022 has not yet been passed.

“Dr Zaliha said that it was with a ‘heavy heart’ that she had signed off on the exemption of nicotine from the Poisons Act that will allow vape liquids including liquids containing nicotine, to be taxed,” MMA president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai said in a statement last night.

He said the MMA, along with the Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control (MCTC), the National Cancer Society of Malaysia (NCSM), and the Malaysian Pharmacists Society (MPS) had postponed – at MOH’s request – a joint press conference initially scheduled last Monday on the issue to allow MOH to meet with MMA first.

“The MMA, out of respect for the Health Ministry’s wishes, postponed its press conference to allow room for the health ministry to explain its stand on the matter. We have heard the ministry’s explanation and still do not find the reasons given acceptable,” Dr Muruga said.

“The government could have waited just one or two more months for the Control of Smoking and Tobacco Products Bill 2022 to be tabled and passed first before proceeding with the exemption of nicotine from the Poisons Act. Health concerns must come first above all.

“Removing nicotine from the list of controlled substances under the Poisons Act now allows any vape – both containing nicotine and non-nicotine – to be sold openly and legally to anyone including children of any age. Nicotine is a dangerous, highly addictive substance.”

Besides MMA, the MPS, NCSM, and MCTC were also present at the Thursday meeting with Dr Zaliha and MOH officials.

MMA told the government to “be accountable” for its decision and show its commitment to the generational end game (GEG) – which seeks to prohibit tobacco and vape products for anyone born from 2007 – in the Control of Smoking Product for Public Health Bill 2023. This is the new name for the tobacco bill tabled last year.

“There have been various government anti-cigarette smoking campaigns over the years. It is time the Health Ministry shows that it is equally committed to eradicating vape addiction with nationwide anti vaping campaigns through the mass media, social media and at the community level,” Dr Muruga said.

“There is scientific evidence already available on the harmful effect of vaping on health. The MMA will support the government in these efforts.

“If we are late to address the issue of growing vape addiction in the country, all the tax revenue collected from the vape industry might not even be enough to pay for the medical costs to treat health issues caused by vape addiction.”

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim told Parliament last Tuesday that the government was committed to tabling the smoking product bill in the upcoming parliamentary meeting in May, but said he opposed banning tobacco and vape products.