

'Endgame' bill about preventing future addiction, not immediate ban on smoking, say doctors

The Malaysian Medical Association says the idea behind the Tobacco Product and Smoking Control Bill 2022 is a prevention of early addiction.

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If passed, the Tobacco Product and Smoking Control Bill 2022 will criminalise the consumption of any tobacco product or substitute tobacco product by those born after 2007.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has stepped up support for the health ministry's bill to weed out the smoking habit from a young age, saying the so-called generational endgame (GEG) is not about an immediate ban but about sparing future generations from the consequences of addiction.

"We understand that certain industry groups may be unhappy about the move, but we believe it is time that Malaysians prioritise health and embrace a healthy lifestyle," MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said in a statement today.

"The country will gain economically by not having to bear the burden of people being afflicted with diseases associated with tobacco use and Evali (e-cigarette or vaping product use-associated lung injury)," he added.

"The whole idea behind GEG is to prevent addiction to these products."

The Tobacco Product and Smoking Control Bill 2022 was tabled for a first reading on July 27, with debate on the topic to continue at the Dewan Rakyat today.

If passed, the bill will criminalise the consumption of any tobacco product or substitute tobacco product by those born after 2007.

It will also prohibit the possession and use of smoking devices as tobacco and smoking substances, with offenders liable to a fine of up to RM5,000.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said the bill was to protect future generations from becoming involved in smoking and addiction, and to reduce the percentage of smokers in Malaysia to less than 5% by 2040.

Government statistics from 2019 showed that one in five Malaysians aged 15 and above were smokers.

They also found that 17% of those aged 13 to 15 were smokers, as were 9% of children aged 12 and below.

In his statement today, Koh said addiction was "a disease that is extremely difficult to treat".

"We need to prevent early addiction by not allowing our young to pick up the unhealthy habit," he added.

"We all know and can see for ourselves that kids even as young as 14 are experimenting with cigarettes and vaping products. By the time they hit their 20s, they could very well be addicted if not already so while in their teens."

Urging MPs not to let the majority down in this regard, he called on the health ministry to press on with the implementation of the GEG.

"Even with the ban of sale of cigarettes to those 18 and below, we were not able to prevent new generations from smoking.

"With proper implementation, enforcement and public support, we believe the GEG will be effective in curbing a future of smokers and vapers," he said.