

Puffing away to bad health

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MMA says smoking and use of vape and shisha products a worrying trend among youths. Amirul Syafiq Mohd Din/THESUNpix

PETALING JAYA: While the cost of smoking has gradually increased over the years, many Malaysians continue to puff away at open air restaurants and other venues, despite being aware of the health hazards.

They are also aware that vaping and shisha products containing nicotine have been banned since Jan 1, 2019.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) said it will support any move to further discourage, prevent or stop people from smoking in public spaces.

MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said it is worrying that vape and shisha smoking has become a habit among youths.

"If the trend continues, more cases of diseases linked to vaping and smoking will be added to the already high numbers we have at our healthcare facilities.

"However, we should not only be looking into smoking products with nicotine. There are many chemicals, especially in vaping products, which can be difficult to identify and may be harmful to health.

"Vape aerosols contain nicotine, ultrafine particles, many other toxins and several cancer causing agents," he said, adding that non-vapers can also risk their health if they are exposed to these vape aerosols.

In view of the health concerns, Koh said the Health Ministry should consider an outright ban on vaping and smoking shisha at eateries and work towards a total ban on the sale of all vaping and shisha products as soon as possible.

"The ban on using these products at eateries will be a challenge to enforce if such products are still widely available.

"Restaurant staff are also having a tough time trying to get customers to smoke cigarettes outside the boundaries of its premises," he said.

Nasi Kandar Klasik Maju owner Vishnu Vigneswaran said no checks had been made since the ban on vaping and shisha was implemented in 2019.

He said diners were still using vape and shisha at eateries.

"When the ban was implemented, the Health Ministry only had a few of their personnel on the ground to conduct checks. But that was only in the beginning, and since then, the officers have not come around.

"Three years have passed, and we don't hear or read about people getting fined for smoking or vaping at eateries."

Vishnu also said shop owners have to play a vital role in the implementation of the law or face major consequences.

"The problem is that restaurateurs themselves smoke at their premises. If the government is sincere about enforcing the ban, they should have made the penalties harsher. It is not often that you see a city council officer or health authorities conducting checks to curb this problem.

"The government should take this matter seriously and enforce the ban if it believes the matter is of serious public health concern," said Vishnu.