



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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## Press Statement

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### Quitters are winners

In conjunction with this year's World No Tobacco Day theme "Commit to quit", the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) urges:

- > Smokers and vapers quit their habit, not only because of the money they save but also not to jeopardise their health. The people should not let the tobacco industry use them as pawns to advance their business interests.
- > The government should not entertain the tobacco and the vape industries' interference and policy development. For example, in 2019, the tobacco industry successfully blocked a scheduled tobacco tax increase. The industry and its front groups also opposed the vaping ban to apply in certain states to become a national policy.

As recently as April 2021, the Malaysia Retail Electronic Cigarette Association (MRECA) president Datuk Adzwan Ab Manas urged the government to regulate vape products and to legalise nicotine-based products. The reason given was that Malaysia has to "keep abreast with how vape products, in particular, those containing nicotine are regulated so that they can be safely consumed". Currently vape liquids with nicotine have been banned in Malaysia since 2015.

We, however, urge the government to ban all electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS or e-cigarettes), Heated Tobacco Products (HTPs). The government should at the same time strictly regulate all tobacco products (such as cigarettes, cigars, bidis, and chewing tobacco) according to the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) guidelines.

Nicotine is both highly addictive and a toxic chemical. It is categorised as a Class C poison that requires a pharmacist's prescription and studies have shown that it is addictive as heroin or cocaine. This explains why smokers can experience withdrawal symptoms.

Adzwan Ab Manas in late 2020 dangled the prospect of gaining between RM265 million and RM300 million in tax revenue from vape tax by the government. However, he did not reveal the industry's hidden agenda is to entice the youth into a likely life-long addiction to nicotine.

Vape juice or e-liquid (the liquid that will be vaporised by the ENDS device for inhalation) has never been safe as often claimed. Its main constituent is propylene glycol and has been argued by its proponents that it is listed as Generally Recognised As Safe (GRAS). However, its pulmonary toxicity due to prolonged exposure is not known. According to the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States of America, it stated: "No studies of health effects in humans were found".

Recent studies have shown that e-liquid aerosol does contain carcinogens such as formaldehyde, acetaldehyde and heavy metals such as cadmium and nickel. Research literature review of e-cigarette health effects found increased chances of chronic cough, phlegm and bronchitis, and asthma diagnoses. The first study to associate ENDS use to cancer was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences on 22 October 2019.

Other studies have shown that e-liquid impaired immune cell function in the lungs and this raises concern about the user's susceptibility to bacterial and viral infections of the respiratory system. This is particularly true when smokers pull down their masks to smoke and have hand to mouth movement and are more likely to touch their face, increasing their risk of Covid-19 infection. Such behaviour exposes them to a likelihood of infection.

The government should know the costs of treating such non-communicable diseases (NCD) that run into billions, wiping out the measly RM300 million vape tax revenue. NCDs related to smoking and vape use are highly preventable.

It is known that many students have taken up vaping because it is easier to conceal than a packet of cigarettes from school authorities. There have also been reports of business promotion of vaping among students. E-liquid without nicotine content is not safe either and it is a gateway for users, particularly the youths, to progress into smoking or nicotine-based ENDS. The industry often disinform by claiming that ENDS is a means to quit smoking.

The government can anticipate a similar problem as smoking that the government has failed to eliminate after more than 70 years of knowing how dangerous smoking can be.

The first study to link e-cigarette use to cancer was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences October 2019. Researchers found that mice exposed to e-cigarette aerosol for 54 weeks developed carcinomas of the lungs and abnormal bladder cell growth.

There are at least 20,000 flavours of e-liquids available in the market. Many of these can be purchased online and the government should seriously consider banning online advertisement and sale of ENDS and HTPs.

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