



## ***THE MALAYSIAN THORACIC SOCIETY***

13 November 2015

### **An open letter to the Members of Parliament of Malaysia**

We, the undersigned medical professional bodies and non-governmental organisations, would like to register our concern regarding the increasing presence of electronic cigarettes and vaping in our society. We note with dismay the Cabinet's rejection of the Ministry of Health's proposal to ban the sales and use of electronic cigarettes.

1. Malaysia proudly signed and ratified the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). This is a reflection of the nation's commitment to protect present and future generations from the devastating effects of tobacco, a product that kills 6 million users annually. In Malaysia alone, eight individuals are killed daily due to tobacco and many more are affected by the significant health, social, economic and environmental costs.
2. It is a commonly held but misleading view that electronic cigarettes and vaping are safe. However, due to the lack of any form of quality control, equipment malfunction (include explosions leading to death) have been reported. The content of electronic cigarette 'juice' also varies depending on the manufacturer, with studies demonstrating a huge variability in toxin content and nicotine delivery. Even claims that the colourings used are safe are misleading as most consist of industry-certified food dyes, which can be safely swallowed but not necessarily safely inhaled.
3. The increasing use of electronic cigarettes, ostensibly as a smoking cessation tool, is not backed by current scientific evidence. Although the potential for harm reduction is an opportunity not to be missed, we must be careful that we are not substituting one form of addiction for another. At present, scientific evidence indicates that most individuals end up being dual users - i.e. using electronic cigarettes and tobacco at the same time. We are cognisant of the harmful effects of nicotine dependence, which is why it is a Group C Poison under the Poisons Act 1952.
4. The use of electronic cigarettes does not solve the problem of nicotine addiction. This problem is compounded by the fact that electronic cigarettes are gaining popularity amongst youth. Studies from the United States have demonstrated that children are increasingly using electronic cigarettes and that these same children are more likely to eventually smoke tobacco. In other words, the use of electronic cigarettes is a gateway to lifelong nicotine addiction.

Suite 2-3, Medical Academies of Malaysia, 210 Jalan Tun Razak 50400 Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

Email : [m.thoracicsociety@gmail.com](mailto:m.thoracicsociety@gmail.com) ; [secretariat@mts.org.my](mailto:secretariat@mts.org.my)

Tel / Fax : 603 2856 9539 Website : [www.mts.org.my](http://www.mts.org.my)

5. It is clear that many products are targeted at younger sections of society despite claims to the contrary. Electronic cigarettes are sold with attractive colours and flavours, with marketing very similar to that employed by the tobacco industry in decades gone by. The sexualisation of the product with advertisements consisting of scantily-clad women and flavours such as 'the taste of a virgin' and 'nenen' (breast milk) also points to a worrying trend that is against the cultural norms of our beloved nation.

6. It is because of these factors that we welcome the statement by the Health Minister, Datuk Seri S Subramaniam, regarding the Ministry of Health's long-term aim to ban electronic cigarettes. We truly believe that this move is for the benefit of our rakyat's health. It is also in keeping with similar moves by our neighbours in the region, namely Singapore, Thailand and Brunei.

We are aware of allegations that this move is a result of lobbying by the tobacco industry, but it should be pointed out that most electronic cigarettes are manufactured by tobacco companies. Furthermore, we welcome the statements by YB Khairy Jamaluddin (Minister for Youth and Sports) and Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim, Deputy Director-General for Public Health, that a ban of electronic cigarettes should be in tandem with a ban of tobacco.

We call upon Parliament, as the most august law-making body of the land, to take the above points into consideration and to take into account the following proposals:

- I. restrictions be immediately put in place for the retail sales and public use of electronic cigarettes and vaping
- II. a discussion in Parliament in the foreseeable future regarding the need to implement a ban for both electronic cigarettes and tobacco
- III. introduction of retail licensing for tobacco products retailers
- IV. ensure that restrictions and bans are enforced rigorously without fear or favour
- V. ensure that a fixed proportion of taxes and excise duties raised from tobacco sales are used exclusively for tobacco control efforts
- VI. continuous increase in tobacco taxes and electronic cigarettes alongside related paraphernalia
- VII. support access to smoking cessation services, including subsidising the cost for treatment. We are aware that more than 50% of current smokers in Malaysia are keen to quit, and it is our duty to help them achieve abstinence

We reiterate the point that it is misleading to say that the effects of electronic cigarettes on our health and society is minimal. We must learn from the mistakes made during the public health efforts against tobacco, in which it took decades for the true costs of tobacco to society to be made public.

The health of Malaysians today and tomorrow is too precious a commodity to be gambled. We urge the Members of Parliament from across the political spectrum to set aside their differences and support the Ministry of Health's efforts in prioritising the health of the rakyat above all else.

**Issued by:**

The Malaysian Thoracic Society (MTS) on behalf of the following medical professional bodies and non-governmental organisations:

Academy of Medicine of Malaysia Addiction Medicine Association Malaysia (AMAM)

Asia Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health Kuala Lumpur

College of Public Health Medicine

Consumer Association of Penang (CAP)

Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya

Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Teknologi Mara

Family Medicine Specialists Association (FMSA)

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association (FOMCA)

Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM)

Ikatan Pengamal Perubatan dan Kesihatan Muslim Malaysia (I-Medik)

Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia (IMAM)

Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF)

Lung Foundation of Malaysia (LFM)

Malaysian Academy of Pharmacy

Malaysian Adolescent Health Association (MAHA)

Malaysian Animal-Assisted Therapy for the Disabled and Elderly Association (PETPOSITIVE)

Malaysian Association for Bronchology and Interventional Pulmonology (MABIP)

Suite 2-3, Medical Academies of Malaysia, 210 Jalan Tun Razak 50400 Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

Email : [m.thoracicsociety@gmail.com](mailto:m.thoracicsociety@gmail.com) ; [secretariat@mts.org.my](mailto:secretariat@mts.org.my)

Tel / Fax : 603 2856 9539 Website : [www.mts.org.my](http://www.mts.org.my)

Malaysian Association of Environmental Health  
Malaysian College of Physicians  
Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control (MCTC)  
Malaysian Association of Dental Public Health (MADPH)  
Malaysian Green Lung Association  
Malaysian Gynaecological Cancer Society  
Malaysian Medical Association (MMA)  
Malaysian Paediatric Association (MPA)  
Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society (MPS)  
Malaysian Psychiatric Association (MPA)  
Malaysian Thoracic Society (MTS)  
Malaysian Women's Action for Tobacco Control & Health (MyWATCH)  
Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia (MPCAM)  
National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM)  
Pemuda dan Wanita Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA)  
Penang Medical Practitioners' Society  
Persatuan Belia Islam Nasional  
Persatuan Doktor Pakar Kesihatan Awam Malaysia  
Persatuan Pakar Perubatan Islam Malaysia (PAKAR)  
Persatuan Pengguna-Pengguna Pengangkutan Awam Malaysia (4PAM)  
Pertubuhan Amal Perubatan Ibnu Sina Malaysia (PAPISMA)  
Pertubuhan Doktor-Doktor Islam Malaysia (PERDIM)