

## Changes in e-cigarette policies worldwide

On Sept 18, 2019, the Indian Government announced that it would ban the production and sale of e-cigarettes. The devices are already prohibited in 16 of the country's 29 states. Earlier this year, a report by the Indian Council of Medical Research recommended extending the ban to the entire nation. "These products are usually marketed as being safer alternatives for conventional cigarettes, but such notions of safety are false", said the Indian Government, in a press release. "Widespread use and unchecked proliferation of e-cigarettes... would seriously undermine and derail [the] Government's efforts to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use". The Government added that e-cigarettes were a gateway to combustible cigarettes, particularly for young people, and that it remained unclear whether the devices help stop tobacco use.

The decision came days after the US Secretary of Health and Human Services, Alex Azar, revealed that the Food and Drug Administration will ban flavourings, such as mint and menthol, from e-cigarettes. The move comes amid concerns that the flavours are especially attractive to young people, and an ongoing outbreak of lung injury associated with the use of e-cigarette products, which has affected 530 Americans throughout the country.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 3.6 million middle school and high school students used e-cigarettes in 2018, an increase of 1.5 million on the previous year. This month, Michigan and New York state announced that they would prohibit flavoured e-cigarettes and Massachusetts said it would temporarily ban the sale of all vaping products. There were reports that China will reveal restrictions on e-cigarettes in the next few weeks. South Korea has advised its citizens to discontinue using e-cigarettes.

Laws governing e-cigarettes vary from country to country. Most countries

have no regulation at all. Nations such as Argentina, Brazil, Cambodia, and Thailand have banned the products altogether. Australia prohibits the sale of nicotine for use in e-cigarettes. Some countries classify e-cigarettes as consumer goods, others as tobacco products. Japan regards e-cigarettes as medical products and regulates them under the pharmaceutical affairs law. In South Africa, e-cigarettes are also classified as medicines. The Philippines mandates that the cartridges for e-cigarettes and the devices themselves are child-proof. In Malaysia, one can only obtain nicotine-containing e-cigarettes from pharmacies and medical professionals. The UK has strict rules on e-cigarettes, including restrictions on advertising, ban on sale to minors, and a limit on the amount of nicotine the product can contain. Public Health England has endorsed e-cigarettes, in combination with stop smoking service support, as a means of helping smokers give up tobacco.

In May 2019, the European Respiratory Society (ERS) published a statement in which it put forward a range of arguments against the inclusion of e-cigarettes as part of efforts to combat the tobacco epidemic. "We have this strict policy against collaboration with the tobacco industry, yet it is the industry that is behind e-cigarettes", commented Jørgen Vestbo (Manchester University, Manchester, UK and Chair of the ERS Advocacy Council). Juul, which dominates the e-cigarette market in the USA, are part owned by Altria. Their competitor Vuse is owned by Reynolds American.

Vestbo welcomed the moves against e-cigarettes. "We have not been impressed by the evidence that vaping can reduce smoking", he said. "The reduction of harm appears to be minimal, a lot of people end up having mixed consumption of e-cigarettes and conventional ones; at the same time e-cigarettes are overshadowing the

evidence-based ways of helping people to quit smoking."

John Britton (UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies, Nottingham University, Nottingham, UK) countered that over half of the 3.6 million vapers in the UK are ex-smokers. "There is some scientific basis to banning flavourings, but many smokers find the inhaled nicotine in e-cigarettes too much to bear; it is the flavours that make the difference, it would be a big mistake to ban them", he said. Britton disputed that e-cigarette use leads to the use of combustible cigarettes, pointing out that there have been sharp reductions in the percentage of high school students smoking conventional cigarettes in the USA even as use of e-cigarettes have spiked in the same demographic. He noted that a randomised trial published earlier this year found that quit rates were nearly twice as high in those smokers who used e-cigarettes alongside behavioural support than in those who used nicotine replacement therapy plus behavioural support.

Vestbo stresses the importance of regulation. "In the USA, where there is almost no regulation, we have seen massive take-up of e-cigarettes among youngsters and all those cases of lung injury, whereas in Europe, where the regulation is stronger, we have seen far fewer cases", he told *The Lancet Oncology*.

Talha Khan Burki



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For the **press release from the Indian Government** see

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1585437>

For more on the **Food and Drug Administration's announcement** see

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-vaping-trump/trump-administration-seeks-ban-on-flavored-e-cigarettes-to-combat-youth-addiction-idUSKCN1VW2AJ>

For more on **e-cigarette smoking in adolescents** see [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/youth\\_data/tobacco\\_use/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm)

For the **ERS statement** see <https://www.ersnet.org/advocacy/eu-affairs/ers-position-paper-on-tobacco-harm-reduction-2019>

For the **randomised trial** see *N Engl J Med* 2019; **380**: 629-37