

Smokers who start in primary school

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THE number of smokers in Malaysia has shot up to 5.1 million with 24% of them starting the habit in primary schools, said Health Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Lee Kah Choon.

During a press conference at the Parliament lobby to announce the *Jom-Tak nak Merokok* campaign, he said the ministry will conduct a research to determine "how such students become addicted at such a tender young age".

"In order to expand the market, some tobacco companies increased the nicotine in cigarettes. Therefore, people could be addicted to smoking after taking one or two cigarettes. The ministry has a challenging job to do," Lee said, adding that a research had shown that 30% of cancers were caused by smoking.

Lee said that under the Control of Tobacco Product Regulations 2004, those aged below 18 may be fined up to RM1,000 for smoking.

"If these teenagers are unable to pay the fines, then their parents will have to pay on their behalf," he said.

At the Dewan Rakyat

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Lee said that under the campaign from June to September, the ministry will be working with MPs and state assemblymen to reach out to the people.

"Some MPs are smokers and through the campaign, we will advise them to be a role model for others," he said.

On a lighter note, Lee said former Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik was reminded not to smoke at a government function.

"We hope everyone will voice up when they see someone around them smoking," he said.

Lee said the difference between the *Jom-Tak nak Merokok* campaign and the previous *Tak Nak Merokok* campaign was that the former is part of the healthy lifestyle campaign.