

PROS

- Successful in helping smokers kick the habit.
- No tobacco and second-hand smoke.
- Less hazardous than smoking.

CONS

- Insufficient studies on the safety of second-hand vapour.
- Most juices contain nicotine. Nicotine poisoning can lead to death in children.
- Unregulated manufacture and sale.

Bloomb
TV Malaysia



A new addiction

UNREGULATED, vaping will create a population of nicotine and drug addicts among non-smokers, warns Universiti Malaya associate professor Dr Amer Siddiq Amer Nordin.

Self-regulation alone is not enough because there are “rogues” in the industry, he says.

Previously, nicotine was only introduced through tobacco use. Now, a new breed of nicotine addicts who have never smoked are emerging, he says.

Nicotine in youngsters are especially dangerous because it affects the brain, he says, adding that a growing number of college students are selling vape kits to their juniors for side income.

“Don’t be naive. Vape mimics smoke. How do parents explain the difference to impressionable youths?”

The juices – mostly containing nicotine – and advertisements, are enticing to teens, he says. He notes that more young women have also started vaping.

Dr Amer Siddiq, who is also a consultant psychiatrist and nicotine addiction specialist, is planning to research the vaping phenomenon here.

Questioning the legality of selling nicotine juices, he says the lack of labels and proper lab testing are also worrying.

We know how each agent inside the juices work but when mixed together, is the chemical reaction safe, he asks.

“Even the devices don’t have to meet Sirim standards and can be misused to vape drugs,” he cautions.

He says that in the United States, a new designer drug called Flakka is often smoked using e-cigs.

A technical working group to study the impact of e-cigarettes on smokers and those surrounding them has been formed, Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah says.

Vaping teens

Sunday Star
28/6/2015
m/s 23

“I doubt these are their own accounts,” he says, adding that parents should check their credit cards and how much allowance they’re giving their children as vape supplies aren’t cheap.

Insisting that most vapers are ex-smokers, not minors, he says underage alcohol consumption, smoking and sex are more pressing issues.

Chong, who started smoking at 17, says neither is safe but vaping is the lesser of two evils.

“There’s no control over who can buy or sell the mods or brew the juice.”

Rahmat warns vapers against buying from such vendors as it’s dangerous and could blow up.

“Non-smokers shouldn’t vape as there’s a risk you’ll be addicted to nicotine.

“But, if you’re going to vape, do it safely. Understand your device and how electronics work,” he says.

Malaysia E-Vaporizers & Tobacco Alternative Association president Allen Foo

A COLLEGE student who only wanted to be known as Cookie Monster, 19, has vaper friends as young as 14.

And, two of her girlfriends – age 19 and 20 – are sellers who conduct their business on WeChat messaging.

She also gets many invites on social media on the latest mod and liquid promotions. Vaping is so popular that “vape” was Oxford Dictionaries’ word of the year in 2014.

Urban cool advertising campaigns, photos of celebrities like Katy Perry vaping splashed across the Internet, candy-coloured juices and flavours ranging from exotic blue cheese to chocolates, have created a new generation of teenage vapers.

There are many vapers below 18 – as young as 14 even.

“Some of their family members vape too, so it’s no big deal.”

She says must-haves for trendy girls now are a smartphone, branded bag and the latest mod.

“It’s fun blowing vapour clouds. You can form wings and some really awesome shapes.” Unlike cigarettes which smell bad, vape liquids are aromatic and have flavours like coffee, fruits and anything else you can think of, she says. She says it has helped her friend who has been smoking since secondary school, to stop.

Salleh, 21, did it to quit smoking cigarette.

“Last time I smoked one pack a day and now I managed to stop completely. Most of my friends shifted to vape as well,” he says in an email interview with reporter Mienaloshiyani Viruthasalam.

But for Harry, 21, he vaped to taste the hundreds and hundreds of flavours and to be able to do “O”s and other fancy vape tricks.

Asked whether he thought it was healthier than cigarettes, Harry says: “Definitely! It doesn’t contain harmful chemicals, unlike cigarettes. For those who are trying to quit smoking, they have a variety of flavours which contains nicotine from 3mg to 12mg. Smokers can gradually decrease their nicotine intake until they can quit smoking completely.”

Nick Chong, the owner of Vaped.my, a Malaysian vaping guide website, thinks teenage vapers are “only a handful” as most shops turn them away. Admitting that there are always some black sheep, he says it’s much easier for minors to get tobacco cigarettes.

“Maybe they get their vape supply online. It’s difficult to verify age through websites.

“But to make an online purchase, they usually need either a credit card number, Paypal account or Internet banking facility.

“The safety of vaping is debatable, but to an ex-smoker like myself, it’s given me better complexion, confidence and stamina.

“I even made it to Low’s Peak at Mount Kinabalu last month,” he says.

Meanwhile, an Education Ministry spokesperson says vaping is categorised as smoking. Both are banned in schools.

“We don’t have a separate category for vaping or e-cigarettes but it’s considered an addiction. Students who vape are treated as smokers.”

Vape Empire partner Aimran Abdul Rajak says there are parents who buy vape kits for their children as its 30 outlets won’t sell to minors. He says such parents are usually vapers themselves.

“Even Form Two students are smoking these days. Parents just want to help them quit.

“We also had a little girl who knew about vaping through the Internet. She dragged her dad in to help him as he was a heavy smoker.”

Sounding serious, he says, “I’d slap them” if he sees youngsters vaping.

It shouldn’t be allowed in public areas like cinemas and aeroplanes as not everyone approves of it, he adds.

Vaporizer Convention Kuala Lumpur 2015 co-organiser Rahmat Yahil is also against teenage vaping.

“Kids blowing clumps of vape in malls are giving the industry a bad reputation.

“To limit access, the minimum price of a starter kit should be RM500 and only those above age 21 should be allowed to vape,” he says.

He says the boom among teens is largely due to cheap vaping paraphernalia flooding the market. He, however, stresses that the majority of shops here are ethical and won’t sell to those below 18.

“Kids can get it online and at night markets. It’s so easily available.

“For less than RM100, you can get a mass-produced, low quality mod with enough juice to vape for a month.

says the current devices are fifth generation e-cigs with safety features like temperature control but more education is needed.

“E-cigs are like a cars. If you give a 16-year-old a Ferrari, he won’t be able to control it.”

He, however, says it’s impossible to prevent teens from trying new things but “at least vaping is better than smoking”.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations secretary-general Datuk Paul Selvaraj says anything that impacts on the health must be taken seriously.

He says vaping is an area of concern as it’s getting more popular among teens.

“We can’t say hookah, shisha or vape is better than cigarettes. The trend or technology doesn’t matter.

“There must be an effective campaign to wipe out smoking in all forms.”

In March, World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Margaret Chan backed governments that are “banning ... regulating” e-cigarette use.

Non-smoking is the norm and e-cigarettes will derail that normality thinking, because it will attract especially young people to take up smoking, says Chan.

According to the WHO Global Tobacco Survey 2011, the prevalence of ENDS smoking in Malaysian adults was 0.8% – an estimated 164,000 people.

In the US, schools are getting tougher on e-cigarettes, even punishing possession of the devices more harshly than regular cigarettes.

A government survey of more than 41,000 students showed that e-cigarettes, which can also be used for illegal substances like marijuana, have surpassed traditional smoking in popularity among teens.

ENDS are banned in countries like Cambodia, Australia, Canada, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates.

It is banned from public places and subject to the same tight controls as tobacco in France.

The group’s upcoming report, which includes e-cigs as an alternative to reduce smoking, will be used to create a new policy on vaping activities in the country, he says.

This emerging trend seems to be popular among adult smokers attempting to cut back on cigarettes, he says, adding that many studies have shown that the popularity of e-cigarettes is increasing among smokers as an alternative to tobacco.

“(However) the vaping trend or e-cigarette smoking among underage Malaysians is something we should be worried about as youngsters by nature are more likely to experiment with new things.”

Once ready, the detailed report will be discussed by the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control steering committee chaired by Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam, he says.

National Institute of Respiratory Medicine director Datuk Dr Abdul Razak Muttalif assures that the report will be ready soon.

“We need some time as the industry is still in its early stages,” he says.

He, however, warns parents that there’s a risk of their children being addicted to nicotine if they are vaping.

“There are pros and cons to vaping. It helps wean smokers off cigarettes but the long-term effects of the vapour is still unknown,” he says.

He says the main concern is the content of the vaping liquid because we don’t know what kind of “funny concoctions” people are coming up with, adding that the devices and liquids must be regulated.

“As the liquid contains nicotine, it’ll be under the ministry’s pharmaceutical department.”

In the United Kingdom, ENDS will be licensed as a medicine from next year to ensure that “standards of quality, safety and efficacy are met; monitoring safety in use, including over the long-term, is provided for; and advertising is controlled through medicines provisions and any emerging risks.”