

# Help current smokers to stub out the habit too, urge experts

THERE are plans to ban smoking and vaping for the younger generation, but more help should also be given to existing smokers.

Respiratory specialist Dr Helmy Haja Mydin says, as quitting can be tough, it is important to make more services available to help smokers snuff out the habit.

"We should consider allowing medicine to treat nicotine addiction be available as over-the-counter products rather than by prescription," he suggests.

Another important measure that can be taken by the government is to increase the availability of "quit smoking" services for the B40 (low income) group.

"This is because about 60% of smokers are from the B40 category," he says.

Dr Helmy says studies have shown that it takes only 10 seconds for smokers or vapers to feel a sense of pleasure.

As such, the more nicotine you consume, the more your body craves it.

"Without it, there are withdrawal symptoms which explains the difficulty in quitting for smokers even though 50% of all smokers want to quit.

"This is one of the reasons there is a vape epidemic among youth in the United States that has led to the Food and Drug Administration there calling for the ban of Juul [an electronic cigarette product]," says Dr Helmy, who is also the

Tobacco and Smoking Control Bill is expected to be tabled in the Dewan Rakyat this month.

Called the generational endgame (GEG), the Health Ministry plans to ban smoking and vaping for those born in 2005 and beyond.

Urging all MPs to vote in favour of passing the Bill, Dr Helmy says protecting our children's future is already a good enough reason to vote for it.

"If not, there is also sufficient data that this move will result in positive economic returns," he adds.

Disagreeing that vaping should be excluded from the GEG, Dr Helmy says ecigarettes are another form of nicotine addiction with their own list of health complications.

"The pro-vape lobby states that they only want to sell in order to help smokers quit. As such, they shouldn't have any problem with the GEG concept as the ban is to prevent new users of cigarettes or electronic cigarettes," he says.

Malaysian Green Lung Association president Ho Rhu Yann says nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as nicotine transdermal patches and nicotine chewing gum should be easily available for purchase at pharmacies.

"This will enable treatment to be made more widely and easily accessible when smokers need it," he says.

Smokers need an instant remedy

years while adapting to other businesses.

"These issues are solvable, but once health is damaged, life is lost, it is irreversible.

"Health should be the only concern the lawmakers have when they evaluate this Bill," he says.

## EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

Here are the health benefits you get over time when you quit smoking cigarettes

### 20 minutes after quitting

■ Your heart rate and blood pressure drop

### After few days

■ The carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal

### Two weeks to three months

■ Blood circulation improves and your lung function increases

### One to 12 months

■ Coughing and

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai says the association is all for the GEG.

"In fact, we have been working very hard over the years for a bold move to be made to end smoking in this nation," he says.

Dr Koh points out that smoking causes a whole host of diseases which includes various cancers, heart diseases and respiratory illnesses.

"It can also contribute to certain eye diseases, stroke, certain immune diseases – the list goes on," he says.

With the move, Malaysia may also see diseases caused by second-hand smoke reduced.

Dr Koh believes that more importantly, the move should push Malaysians to embrace a healthier lifestyle.

"This must become desirable to Malaysians. With more health conscious Malaysians, I believe we will eventually see fewer smokers and vapers," he says.

President of the NGO Ikram Health Malaysia Dr Mohd Afiq Mohd Nor says it is a fact that giving up nicotine is very challenging, especially if someone has been using it for a long period.

"Smokers may experience withdrawal symptoms, which usually start within two to three hours after the last cigarette.

"It may drag from a few days up to a few weeks. That's why one should never start smoking or vaping," he says.

Dr Mohd Afiq says the government can also give some incentives, awards, or tax exemptions to those who have joined smoking cessation programmes and successfully quit for good.

For those who vape, Dr Mohd Afiq says the new Act does not ban

o-founder of Asthma Malaysia, an NGO for patient education and empowerment.

As for parents who smoke and have children who will be under the GEG, he says if they can't quit, they must not smoke in front of their kids or at home.

"This will prevent their children from picking up the behaviour and avoid complications from second-hand smoke," he says, adding that a special programme to promote a no-smoking home can be found at my-house.com.my.

It was reported that the new

for the craving to ease off, just like paracetamol for fever or headache, he explains.

Another factor that affects the access to medicine is affordability.

"The government should treat NRTs like any other medicinal products and consider zero-rating its import tax of 15%.

"This is in contrast to ecigarette gels or liquids which have zero import tax," he says.

For the tobacco industry, Ho says the new Bill will not "kill them overnight" as they can continue to run their businesses for at least 50

## 'Leave vape out of proposed ban on smoking'

AN association representing ecigarette users is urging the government to leave out vape products in its proposed ban on smoking for those born in 2005 and later.

This is because the move, or generational endgame (GEG), lumps together vape with tobacco and covers all vaping products.

"An outright ban will only fuel the illicit market and coupled with weak enforcement, it is a recipe for disaster," says Vape Consumer Association of Malaysia (VCAM) president Tengku Aslahuddin Ja'afar.

While he says the GEG is a good step forward, the VCAM does not support the move.

"The GEG paves the way for unregulated, unsafe and sub-standard products to flood our market when we know that enforcement remains a challenge.

"So it is only wise to create an alternative when the objective is to ban combustible cigarettes.

"The government should ban products that are of higher risk and provide a safer alternative for smokers to switch to, and eventually quit.

"Vape is definitely proven to be less harmful than cigarettes according to many reliable studies by foreign government medical bodies," he says.

Tengku Aslahuddin says smoking is not a crime but a habit that needs to be tackled medically.

"A more effective way is to offer alternatives or else the younger generation will turn towards more harmful substances," he says.

As such, he says the government should rethink its plans.

"I strongly believe that if there are no alternatives, people will start looking elsewhere and this is a dangerous route to go down as people will always find a way," he states.

Instead, VCAM believes that regulating vape products can ensure that they will only be sold to those of legal age.

"There are about two million vapers in Malaysia, and the users get younger and younger, which is very worrying.

"VCAM firmly opposes any form of vape use by underage consumers, whether or not they contain nicotine," stresses Tengku Aslahuddin.



■ Coughing and shortness of breath reduces

■ Structures inside your lungs improve in cleaning your lungs and reduce the risk of infection

### One to two years

■ Your risk of heart attack drops drastically

### Five to 10 years

■ Your risk of mouth, throat, and voice box (larynx) cancers is cut in half

■ Your stroke risk decreases

### 10 years

■ Your risk of lung cancer is about half of a person who is still smoking after 10 to 15 years

■ Your risk of cancer of the bladder, esophagus, and kidney decreases

### 15 years

■ Your risk of coronary heart disease is close to that of a non-smoker

Source: American Cancer Society

TheStar graphics

As such, by having regulations, he says all vape products will only be sold to adult consumers in a safe and legal manner.

Meanwhile, some smokers and vapers believe people should be given a choice whether they want

the product for people born before 2005.

"They still can vape. But of course, we will never stop encouraging them to quit vaping," he says.

National Cancer Society of Malaysia managing director Dr Murallitharan M. says it is critical for smoking cessation tools, products and services to be more widely available at highly subsidised prices, if not for free.

"This should be the government's commitment towards helping current smokers," he says.

to smoke or not.

A vaper who wishes to be known only as Jacob, says the GEG sounds like a "pipe dream" as it will be tough to implement the ban in the long run.

"When someone born in 2005 turns 40 in future, it doesn't appear to make sense to stop such a full grown man from buying a pack of cigarettes.

"Not to mention, people have a choice whether they want to smoke or not.

"To completely decide for the generation born in 2005 and onwards is not fair at all," says the 47-year-old graphic designer.

A personal trainer who wishes to be known only as John, 39, believes it is better for the government to encourage people not to smoke instead of forcing a ban on them.

"Also, I feel the government should give more leeway for vaping as more often than not, it leads to people quitting smoking entirely.

"Vaping is easily much safer than smoking and thus it should not be held to the same standards as smoking," he says.

John adds that it is only some people who give vaping a bad reputation by including cannabis in what they smoke.

"That's clearly illegal no matter the medium," he says.