

E-CIGARETTES POSE PUBLIC HEALTH RISK, SAYS ICMR

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

Non-carcinogenic alternative for smoking. | Photo Credit: [Getty Images/iStockphoto](#)

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has warned of a potential public health disaster if action was not taken to completely prohibit and dissuade the use of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) or e-cigarettes given that the nicotine delivered by these devices adversely affect almost all systems in a human body.

E-cigarette use adversely affects the cardiovascular system, impairs respiratory immune cell function and airways in a way similar to cigarette smoking and is responsible for severe respiratory disease. It also poses risk to foetus, infant, and child brain development, the council noted in a white paper released here on Friday.

“Use of e-cigarettes has documented adverse effects on humans which include DNA damage; carcinogenesis; cellular, molecular and immunological toxicity; respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological disorders and adverse impact on foetal development and pregnancy,” said Prof. Balram Bhargava, director general ICMR.

Given the harmful health effects e-cigarettes pose to users, as well as passive exposure, failure to make appropriate interventions at the right time — by bringing together all stakeholders under one umbrella to prevent this impending epidemic of e-cigarettes use — could lead to a public health disaster in India, Dr. Bhargava asserted.

There are more than 460 different e-cigarette brands with varying configurations of nicotine delivery available in the market, according to the ICMR.

Now, based on the currently available scientific data from multiple streams of research, the ICMR has recommended complete prohibition on ENDS or e-cigarettes in India in the greater interest of protecting public health.

Observing that tobacco consumption, especially cigarette smoking, had shown a decline in India in recent years, Prof. K. Srinath Reddy, president, Public Health Foundation of India and cardiologist and public health expert who had chaired the ICMR expert group for this white paper, said that this had been achieved through several tobacco control measures that had already been initiated.

“Thus, at this juncture, marketing of a product like e-cigarettes, with unproven benefit and high potential harm from addiction and health risks, is unwarranted as a tobacco control measure,” said Dr. Reddy. “The risk of youth addiction is high,” he warned.

E-cigarettes also open a gateway for new tobacco addiction, which is a potential threat to the country’s tobacco control laws and ongoing tobacco control programmes and efforts, Dr. Reddy cautioned.

In its response, Association of Vapers India (AVI) in a statement said that the white paper does not present the true picture.

"The findings of the ICMR paper run counter to empirical data from countries where e-cigarettes are regulated and research conducted by some of the most credible organisations in the world. This could be because they have cherry-picked studies to make a targeted case against e-cigarettes," said Samrat Chowdhery, director of AVI.

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