**Balancing Public Health and Economic Gains: The Debate Over Nicotine in Vaping Products**

Beginning on April 1, 2023, selling, importing, and manufacturing of vape products containing nicotine are exempted from the Poisons Act of Malaysia that, prior to this, such contravention could lead to a fine not exceeding RM200k fine or 10 years imprisonment. Alarmingly, vaper prevalence increased in Malaysia from 0.8% in 2011 to 4.9% in 2019 and further rose to 5.4% in 2020. In the same 2020 survey conducted in Malaysia, it was found that among active vapers, 81.0% used e-cigarettes containing nicotine. It is worth noting that unscrupulous vape suppliers have been taking the risk of selling vape solutions containing nicotine by removing the word 'nicotine' from the ingredients list, prior to this exemption. Similar to trend in Malaysia, 14.1% of high school students in the US are e-cigarette users. Meanwhile, in England, 7.1% of survey participants aged 18+ indicated that they are active vapers. In hindsight, countries where e-cigarettes are legal, including the UK, the United States, Indonesia, and Vietnam are struggling with a vaping "epidemic" among youths that subsequently leads to various health concerns.

This is contrary to our neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Brunei, and Thailand, which prohibited vaping as early as 2015 after realizing the health hazard of vaping. Even though e-cigarettes are allowed in Australia, a medical certified prescription is required for a user to use vape liquid that contains nicotine in Australia for smoking cessation purposes.

In light of the recent decision to remove liquid nicotine used in e-cigarettes and vape from the Poisons List of controlled substances in Malaysia, several precautionary measures can be taken to prevent inappropriate use and potential harm from unmonitored usage:

1. Implementing age restrictions: As seen in the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Australia, the sale and purchase of e-cigarettes and vaping products are prohibited for anyone under the age of 18. Malaysia should introduce similar age restrictions to ensure that these products do not fall into the hands of minors.
2. Establishing regulations on nicotine content and ingredients: UK regulations impose a cap on the nicotine content of e-liquids at 2% and ban certain ingredients like colorings, caffeine, and taurine, which might cause irritation to the lungs. Malaysia could follow suit by implementing similar regulations to control the concentration of nicotine in e-cigarette liquids and prohibit harmful additives.
3. Regulating e-cigarette cartridge (tank) capacity: The UK restricts e-cigarette cartridges to a capacity of no more than 2ml. Malaysia can introduce similar capacity limits to reduce the potential for uncontrolled or excessive nicotine consumption.
4. Introducing labeling requirements and warnings: Clear labeling and warnings about the nicotine content and potential health risks of e-cigarette and vape products can help users make informed decisions about whether to use them.
5. Prohibiting advertising, promotion, and sponsorship of e-cigarettes and vape products: Implementing such restrictions can help limit the exposure and appeal of these products to potential users, particularly young people.

From an economic perspective, legalizing and taxing nicotine in vape products can provide governments with a new source of revenue. This revenue can be used to fund public health initiatives, education programs, and other beneficial projects. However, it is crucial to evaluate whether the revenue generated from taxing nicotine-containing vape products outweighs the potential health risks and the cost of treating health issues related to vaping. While some argue that the tax revenue generated from legalizing nicotine in vape products can contribute to public health initiatives, others contend that the potential health risks associated with increased vaping, such as popcorn lungs, might lead to long-term health consequences that could eventually put a strain on the healthcare system. This may outweigh the benefits of the tax revenue generated. These remedial actions, if implemented, can help address the potential risks associated with the deregulation of nicotine-containing vape products and protect public health in Malaysia. It is crucial for the public to be well-informed about the potential risks associated with e-cigarettes, including heated tobacco containing nicotine. Malaysians should take the initiative to read and understand the contents of vape products they consider using. This includes checking the additive ingredients, nicotine concentration, and other relevant information. Additionally, it is essential to educate our youth on the risks associated with vaping and to encourage open discussions about this topic within school organisations in order to nip the problem in the bud.

In conclusion, the scenario in countries like Indonesia, Vietnam, the UK, and the US, where nicotine in vape is legal, suggests that regulating and taxing these products may not necessarily mitigate the health risks associated with their use. As a nation, we must prioritize public health and safety over the potential tax revenue that may be generated from the sale of nicotine-containing vape products. We urge the government to promptly establish comprehensive regulations to protect our citizens, especially our youth, from the potential health risks associated with vaping.

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