

Vaping: The myths we believe, the science we ignore

Wee Lei Hum

Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, Taylor's University, 47400, Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Vaping has become a major public health concern in Malaysia, adding to the persistent burden of tobacco use. While adult smoking has declined only modestly, e-cigarette use increased from 9.8% in 2017 (≈ 1 in 10 adults) to 14.8% in 2022 (≈ 1 in 7 adults). Among adolescents aged 13–17, prevalence was even higher: 23.5% of boys (≈ 1 in 4) and 6.2% of girls (≈ 1 in 16) reported use. This rise is fueled by aggressive marketing, flavoured products, and myths that vaping is harmless, safer than smoking, or an easy way to quit. Evidence shows serious risks, including nicotine addiction, dual use, and serving as a gateway to smoking and drug use among youth. This plenary will examine the gaps between public perception and scientific evidence. Many continue to believe that vaping reduces harm at the population level, does not affect non-smokers and is safe for youth, yet research consistently demonstrates otherwise. While some trials suggest that a complete switch to nicotine e-cigarettes may improve quit rates compared with standard therapies, uncertainties about sustaining abstinence, long-term safety and the public health trade-off of rising youth uptake in Malaysia limit their value as a population-level harm reduction tool. Vaping is not merely an individual lifestyle choice but a population-scale experiment with Malaysian youth as test subjects. To protect the next generation and advance Malaysia's tobacco and nicotine endgame, the Control of Tobacco Product and Smoking Act 2024 must be rapidly scaled up, widely implemented and strongly enforced.

Keywords: Vaping, Electronic Cigarettes, Malaysia, Nicotine Addiction, Youth