

ICMR calls for ban on e-cigarettes

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The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has recommended complete ban on e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), based on currently available scientific evidence.

In a white paper released today, the council noted that e-cigarettes and other such devices contained not only nicotine solution, which was highly addictive, but also harmful ingredients such as flavoring agents and vaporizers.

“Use of ENDS or e-cigarettes has documented adverse effects on humans, which include DNA damage; carcinogenic, cellular, molecular and immunological toxicity; respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological disorders; and adverse impact on fetal development and pregnancy,” the paper noted.

The paper has rejected the argument that e-cigarettes could help smokers quit tobacco consumption. “While such benefits have not been firmly established, there is also evidence that there is risk of people continuing to use both them as well as tobacco products. In addition, these devices could encourage non-smokers to get addicted to tobacco,” it said.

A committee headed by Dr. K. Srinath Reddy of Public Health Foundation of India analyzing over 300 research articles from across the world and prepared the white paper. It notes that various flavours and attractive designs are adding to the allure of the devices and there was an increasing trend for the use of e-cigarettes among youth and adolescents in many countries.

“Use of ENDS or e-cigarettes can open a gateway for new tobacco addiction. On the balance, these have a negative impact on public health”.

The committee included experts from ICMR, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.

Dr. Reddy noted that presently there were more than 460 different e-cigarette brands with varied configuration of nicotine delivery and they came in over 7,700 flavours and were fast

becoming a fad among youngsters. “Studies have found that youths using e-cigarettes and other such devices are more likely to use regular cigarettes later. They increase the likelihood to experiment with regular products and increase the intention to indulge in cigarette smoking”.

Dr. Ravi Mehrotra, Director of National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research and a member of the panel, said that in the wake of low barrier to entry, the market for e-cigarettes and other such devices is growing rapidly, with the industry bringing in a diverse set of products through a variety of channels.

ICMR Director General Dr. Balram Bhargava said scientific and research data given in the white paper could help the government formulate necessary policies on e-cigarettes and other such devices.