

Experts call for legal agility to tackle influx of drug-laced e-vaporisers

Laws must keep up with drug delivery tech, empower controlled substance list updates

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Medical experts have called for legal agility to tackle vaping, which they say has evolved into a harmful and dangerous scourge with more drug-laced e-vaporisers detected.

Their comments come in the wake of an announcement on July 12 by the Government, which signalled the possibility of tougher enforcement laws to tackle vaping amid a spike in seizures of e-vaporisers laced with the anaesthetic etomidate.

Mr Yip Hon Weng, MP for Yio Chu Kang SMC, who agreed that enforcement laws need to be enhanced, noted that Singapore already has some of the world's toughest drug laws.

"But as the landscape evolves, so must our legal tools.

"There is perhaps scope to go further – for example, by explicitly including combo drug-vape products under the Poisons Act, and granting the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) clearer jurisdiction the moment drug traces are detected," he said.

There have been similar legal updates in the past, Mr Yip said, adding that when Subutex and glue sniffing became threats, the law evolved to empower CNB with the tools to respond.

The same legislative approach can and should apply to drug-laced

vapes, he said.

"Our laws should empower swift updates to controlled substance lists – not wait for the next tragedy to force a response," added Mr Yip.

Professor Teo Yik-Ying, dean of the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, said current laws need to also keep up with the technology used to deliver synthetic drugs.

"Our narcotics laws need to be updated to capture some of these new changes in technology, where the delivery system now is using e-cigarettes and vapes," he said.

"So, effectively, if I am a police officer and I catch someone with a vape, and I detect that the vape cartridge is actually a Kpod... the person is not just caught for vaping, but also caught for possession of narcotics.

"Suddenly... you will realise that the penalty increases so significantly that people now have a fear of just taking Kpods."

Assistant Professor Yvette van der Eijk from the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health said that what has encouraged the spread is the marketing of vaping products from other countries.

"If an influencer from, say, Indonesia promotes vaping products, that content can still reach young Singaporeans.

"Also, for a policy to be effective, it must be properly enforced, and people must be aware of its rationale so that they accept the policy. Stronger enforcement in the com-

munity and more education would be helpful," said Prof van der Eijk.

STARTING YOUNG

While some have argued for regulating vaping rather than an outright ban, recent studies in Britain have shown that regulations do little to limit access to e-vaporisers, including those laced with drugs.

In Britain, vaping is legal for those above the age of 18, although disposable vapes have been banned across all age groups since June 1, 2025, to address environmental concerns and to protect young people from nicotine addiction.

Professor Christopher Pudney from the University of Bath in Britain said his research showed that vapers there start young, between the ages of 13 and 16.

"Around the middle of 2023, we started to see a lot of media reports in the UK of children collapsing in schools, associated with vaping," Prof Pudney told ST.

"So, we just tracked those media reports. And it got to the point where there was almost one report every week of a child collapsing in school, which is obviously insane."

His studies also showed that schoolchildren may be unknowingly smoking vapes spiked with synthetic cannabis, also known as Spice.

The researchers in his team found that out of 596 vapes confiscated across 38 schools in England, one in six contained Spice.

Prof Pudney, a biotechnology expert, said tests his team conducted have also picked up traces of heroin, MDMA (commonly found in Ec-



VAPES WITH A TWIST OF TERROR

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YIO CHU KANG MP YIP HON WENG

stasy) and ketamine in seized vaporisers.

He used the world's first portable device, which is able to detect synthetic drugs in vapes in 30 seconds, to trace the chemicals.

Mr Yip said he is aware that CNB and the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) are already building up rapid-testing and toxicology capabilities to detect novel substances in vape liquids.

Dr Sharen Tian, a family physician at Raffles Medical Group, said that when etomidate is misused via vapes, it can induce euphoria and dissociation, leading to psychological dependence.

"Abusing etomidate through vaping can lead to severe health complications," she told ST.

"The identified adverse effects include nausea, muscle spasms, respiratory depression, seizures and psychosis."

Initially, adult smokers seeking alternatives were the primary users of e-vaporisers, said Dr Tian. However, recent data indicates a surge in adolescent usage, with cases involving individuals as young as 13 years old.

Mr Yip said that current standard hospital tests may not always pick up new synthetic substances unless they are specifically looking for them.

Parents should therefore not take a "clean" test result at face value if their child is showing worrying signs: confusion, seizures, erratic or zombie-like behaviour.

"One way is to insist on a comprehensive toxicology screen, and alert medical professionals to the possibility of vaping-related drug intake," he said.

Mr Yip added that accident and emergency staff, clinicians at the Institute of Mental Health, school counsellors and general practitioners should also be updated regularly on new trends in drug-laced vapes, so they can respond appropriately.

"Most importantly, talk to your children. These are no longer 'just vapes'. They are chemical cocktails disguised in sleek devices – or as I call them, 'vapes with a twist of terror,'" he said.

BORDER CHECKS

Breaking the wave of e-vaporisers

and Kpods requires sharper and more coordinated enforcement, from stepping up checks at the borders to tightening screening at parcel processing centres, said Mr Yip.

He added that it is critical to track deliveries and follow the trail to arrest not just buyers, but also the local distributors and peddlers.

Mr Yip said enforcement efforts must also go digital.

"We should leverage AI-powered surveillance to scan darknet markets, Telegram groups and smuggling forums, where new trends often appear first," he added.

While acknowledging that the authorities are already collaborating across agencies and also working with regional counterparts, Mr Yip said this must be scaled up further.

Beyond enforcement, public awareness matters, he said, noting that many people still do not know how to report such offences.

Mr Yip added: "Today, reporting to HSA relies on a weekday office line (it is on their website). A suggestion would be for 24/7 hotlines, online reporting or even integration with the OneService app.

"We also need to reach young people where it matters – on the platforms where syndicates target them, like Telegram and social media.

"Community education, peer-led interventions and even celebrity-driven cautionary campaigns could help shift perceptions."

Mr Yip said that as a father of five young children, he has got "skin in the game".

"This is more than just a policy challenge – it is a growing threat in schools, community and online spaces.

"The recent case involving teenagers reportedly behaving erratically after inhaling drug-laced Kpods outside a Punggol mall is not just worrying – it is a red flag.

"These devices are not only illegal, but they are also dangerous and designed to avoid detection," he added.

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