Support for WHO evidence-based publication on electronic cigarettes

The World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) strongly supports the evidence-based position taken by the World Health Organization (WHO) following publication of its report on the issue of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), more commonly known as electronic cigarettes – or e-cigarettes.

CONCERNS

The WFPHA shares the concerns expressed by the WHO about the safety of these products. These concerns include:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) noted that both the safety of e-cigarettes and their alleged superior efficacy in smoking cessation have not been scientifically demonstrated.
- There is a serious potential threat to health arising from the deep inhalation of fine and ultra-fine particles, and nicotine many times a day and over prolonged periods.
- E-cigarettes may lead minors to try other tobacco products—including conventional tobacco cigarettes.
- Marketing of e-cigarettes may be used as a ‘trojan horse’ or subversive device.
  - Effectively marketing tobacco products.
  - Undermining the huge global achievements in ‘denormalizing’ tobacco use and the smoking “performance”.
- E-cigarettes may cause many smokers to only reduce smoking, instead of quitting, in the mistaken belief that they are reducing harm, when large epidemiological prospective studies of smoking reduction show little health benefit.
- There is a lack of evidence about second hand (or passive) exposure to e-cigarettes.
- There is a lack of quality control standards in the manufacture, distribution and use of e-cigarettes.

POSITION

Therefore, the WFPHA:

- Endorses WHO’s call for caution and seeks the application of the precautionary principle by governments.
- Calls for further evidence and research.
- Emphasize that ENDS/e-cigarettes should not be used as a means of bypassing Article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) or re-normalizing smoking behavior.

The WHO report rightly notes that there is a need for more research on various aspects of ENDS. These include short- and long-term harms, efficacy as a smoking cessation measure (including consideration of dual use), the overall impact of ENDS on tobacco prevalence and smoke exposure, and the impacts of ENDS promotion and use on re-normalizing smoking behavior.
ACTION

In support of the WHO approach, the WFPHA calls for regulations to:

• Ban all forms of advertising and promotion for ENDS to ensure both that children, young people and non-smokers are not exposed to ENDS promotions and that any commentary about ENDS is made by governments and health authorities, not by those with a commercial interest in these products and tobacco promotion
• Ensure strict emission and control measures for e-cigarettes
• Prohibit unproven health claims about e-cigarettes
• Ensure that smoke-free measures are applied to ENDS products in all situations where they apply to smoking
• Protect existing tobacco control efforts from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry by ensuring that Article 5.3 of the FCTC is fully applied to those involved in production and promotion of ENDS
• Ensure that any claims on the health benefits of ENDS or their efficacy as a cessation aid are rigorously reviewed by independent authorities and subject to appropriate governmental controls
• Take all possible steps to minimize potential health risks to e-cigarette users and nonusers; this should include applying smoke-free measures to ENDS products
• Ensure that there is maximum continuing action as recommended by WHO to reduce smoking, without distraction from discussions on ENDS.

PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH

There are grave concerns from WHO and other health authorities about the role of tobacco companies, which now dominate the e-cigarette market, in using e-cigarettes to promote their own commercial interests, seek involvement in policy processes, and undermine key tobacco control initiatives, and advertise and promote e-cigarettes in ways that will normalise (or re-normalise) smoking behaviour, particularly among young people.

The WFPHA supports the activities in the above ‘actions’ section as it believes that it is appropriate for the WHO to take a precautionary approach until such time as there is significant evidence to determine the extent of dangers or possible benefits associated with e-cigarettes.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Therefore, the WFPHA calls for further independent research with particular attention to the following:

• The potential risks of e-cigarettes to users and non-users
• The development and promotion of e-cigarettes as a means of engaging children, young people and non-smokers;
• The maintenance of the smoking habit through e-cigarettes;
• The role played by e-cigarettes in smoking cessation over time
• The impact of advertising and promotion of e-cigarettes in undermining tobacco control developments
• The impact of e-cigarettes in undermining global and national implementation of Article 5.3 of the FCTC