Misleading advertising targeted at youth

- The marketing strategy of e-cigarettes targets at youth and non-smokers. E-cigarettes can easily be found in shopping mall, boutiques, consignment stores and fashion stores, as well as online platforms like social media, group purchase website and online specialty store. The price of e-cigarettes is affordable, ranging from tens of dollars to several hundred dollars and can be used repeatedly which induces teenagers to try.

- According to the Thematic Household Survey Report No. 64, the prevalence of ever e-cigarette use among primary school students and secondary school students were 1.4% and 8.7% respectively.

- The rapidly ascending number of youngsters using e-cigarettes in the past few years is alarming. According to a survey conducted by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, e-cigarette use among secondary school students in the United States in 2015 was about 10 times more than in 2011. The rate of e-cigarette use among high school students was increased from 1.5% to 16% during this period.

- Most e-cigarettes do not provide details of their ingredients but are marketed as non-addictive, safe and harmless, an aid for smoking cessation, accredited and environmentally friendly which mislead consumers about their safety and effectiveness and attract youngsters to use.

Safety in doubt, not a tool for quitting smoking

- Generally, no information and label on the ingredients of e-cigarettes is provided. The chemicals contained and produced during heating are unknown. This brings risk to the health of users. The safety of e-cigarettes device was questionable. Damage and accidents due to e-cigarette explosion are frequently reported in the media.

- There is insufficient scientific evidence so far to support the claim that e-cigarettes can help quit smoking. On the other hand, there are foreign researches showing that smokers using e-cigarettes to quit smoking will cause dual use of nicotine. World Health Organization (“WHO”) does not recognize e-cigarette as a legitimate tool for smoking cessation and expresses concerns over the growing trend of e-cigarette use.

Gateway to youth smoking, increase smokers’ dependency on nicotine

- Many e-cigarettes resemble traditional tobacco products and the manufacturers emphasized e-cigarettes as an “experience like cigarette smoking”. The advertising and marketing strategies are similar to those of traditional cigarettes. These could renormalize smoking behaviour and serve as a gateway to youth smoking.
A follow-up study in the United States found that students who had used e-cigarettes were more likely to initiate the use of combustible tobacco products after 6 months and 12 months, including cigarettes, cigars and hookah.

The Secondary School Smoking Survey 2012/13 conducted by the School of Public Health of The University of Hong Kong found that e-cigarette users were more likely to smoke cigarettes, had higher dependence of nicotine, less possibility to quit smoking and more likely to have respiratory symptoms such as cough and phlegm.

**Containing harmful substances that cause health risks**

- E-cigarettes had been put on the market for only about ten years. However, more and more overseas researches found that e-cigarettes contain chemicals that are harmful to health. Some chemical substances could release other toxic and carcinogenic substances after heating and vaporization, eg nicotine, propylene glycol, glycerol, formaldehyde, acetaldehyde, additives, tobacco-specific nitrosamines and heavy metals. These could cause addiction, unwell, coughing, damage to body cells and tissues, as well as respiratory diseases. Severe cases can cause cancer and death.

- COSH commissioned Hong Kong Baptist University to carry out laboratory test on e-cigarettes sold in Hong Kong and found several harmful chemicals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harmful chemicals found in e-cigarettes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)</strong> Carcinogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poly-Brominated Diphenyl Ethers (PBDEs)</strong> Flame retardant used in electric products, which can affect thyroid secretion, reproductive system and fetal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formaldehyde</strong> Carcinogen, result in respiratory symptoms, and eye, nose, and throat irritation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glycerin</strong> Cause cancer when heated to high temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heavy Metal (eg tin, nickel, copper, lead)</strong> Metal nanoparticles enter deep into our sacs of lung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trace of nicotine</strong> Highly addictive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ban on e-cigarettes promptly to protect public health**

- Due to the potential health risks of e-cigarettes and its impact on tobacco control, WHO urges countries to consider regulating and prohibiting e-cigarettes. Currently, at least 16 countries, including Singapore, Thailand and Brazil, have imposed a complete ban on e-cigarettes, which is a global trend. Sale and promotion of e-cigarettes were already banned in Macau since January 2018.

- COSH’s survey in 2017 showed that about 3.5% of the respondents had ever used e-cigarettes. E-cigarettes are yet prevailing in Hong Kong. However, over one-third of respondents (37.4%) who had tried e-cigarettes were aged 15-29, which was significantly higher than the other age groups.

- While more studies on the harmful effects of e-cigarettes may take decades, e-cigarettes should be prohibited to minimize potential health risks to the public. Hong Kong had banned smokeless tobacco product in the 1980s to nip in the bud and safeguard public health. In countries where use of smokeless tobacco is popular, their governments encounter great difficulties in regulating them effectively.

- Hong Kong Government has submitted proposals to the Legislative Council in May 2015 to completely ban e-cigarettes. COSH advocates the Government and Legislative Council to enact the legislation as soon as possible in order to prevent the public, especially the youth, from picking up e-cigarette use and the smoking habit.

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