

France sees restrictions on e-cigarettes

31 May 2013

Health Minister Marisol Touraine on Friday said France would apply the same bans to electronic cigarettes as it does to tobacco but would not completely outlaw the popular smokeless product.

It means that advertising of so-called e-cigarettes will be banned, as will their sale to under-18s and their use in public places, a measure that has been in place for tobacco since 2007.

"I have decided that the measures which apply to tobacco will also be extended to electronic cigarettes," Touraine told a press conference coinciding with World No Tobacco Day.

"We have to set limits on this practice but nothing justifies an overall ban," she said, adding the e-cigarette could in some cases help addicted smokers wean themselves off their habit.

Invented in China in 2004, the e-cigarette has a diode that heats up a liquid, usually containing [propylene glycol](#), [nicotine](#) and flavourings, delivering it as a gas to the lungs with each draw.

The user exhales vapour, but not smoke, a practice called "vaping."

The argument in favour of the devices is that they do not have the tar, ash and toxins found in conventional cigarettes.

For health experts, though the jury is still out.

The UN's [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) has said that the safety of e-cigarettes "has not been scientifically demonstrated... (and) the potential risks they pose for the health of users remains undetermined."

Several countries, including Colombia, Panama and Uruguay, have banned e-cigarettes. In April, Italy raised the legal limit for buying them from 16 to 18, citing the potentially high dose of addictive nicotine that is inhaled.

The [US Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA) on its website says consumers had no way of knowing how much nicotine "or other potentially [harmful chemicals](#)" are being inhaled.

Also unclear, it says, is whether young people might become hooked on nicotine and thus try smoking tobacco, whose health impacts are well known.

The measures announced by Touraine were recommended by a panel of [health experts](#) led by Professor Bertrand Dautzenberg, a pulmonologist who heads the French Office for Preventing Tobacco Use (OFT).

According to industry sources, around half a million people in France use e-cigarettes.

Touraine added that packets of conventional cigarettes would henceforth carry a logo urging pregnant women not to smoke. A similar pictogram already appears on bottles of wine.

French newspapers on Friday carried large advertisements from anti-tobacco groups calling for cigarette companies to be hit with a special tax to help meet the health bills of people who fall sick from smoking, at a time when ministerial budgets are being cut.

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