

**E-CIGARETTES: A NEW PERIL UNDER SCRUTINY**

- **Context:** The Government has put forth a proposal to ban e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS).

**What Are E-Cigarettes?**

- An e-cigarette is a handheld battery-powered vaporizer that simulates smoking by providing some of the behavioural aspects of smoking, including the hand-to-mouth action of smoking, but without burning tobacco.
- Electronic cigarettes or electronic nicotine delivery systems, are used by people to inhale an aerosol, which typically contains nicotine (though not always), flavourings, and other chemicals.
- Using an e-cigarette is known as “vaping” and the user is referred to as a “vaper.”

**Why it Has Been Hard to Regulate Them?**

- As e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA), which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.

**Reasons for A Complete Ban:**

- Instead of burning tobacco, e-cigars heat a liquid to generate a nicotine-containing aerosol that does not produce toxic tars. But the nicotine is the same addictive component as that of the tobacco products.
- Foetal and adolescent nicotine exposure may have long-term consequences for brain development, potentially leading to learning and anxiety disorders.
- E-cigarettes are not completely safe, as at high temperatures, e-cigarettes produce carcinogens such as formaldehyde.
- They also increase the odds of lung disease and myocardial infarction.
- Nonetheless, its carcinogenic and other health implications are believed to be lesser than for normal cigarettes, although long-term data isn't available.

## Claims Supporting Banning of E-Cigarettes:

- ▶▶ The WHO report stating that nicotine itself is not a carcinogen but it may function as a “tumour promoter” and seems to be involved in the biology of malignant disease as well as of neurodegeneration has to be seriously noted of.
- ▶▶ Indian Council of Medical Research (the apex body of biomedical research in India) has already called for a “complete prohibition on ENDS and e-cigarettes in India in the greater interest of protecting public health, in accordance with the precautionary principle preventing public harm from a noxious agent.
- ▶▶ The Health Ministry last year issued an advisory asking the States to ensure that products like e-cigarettes and e-nicotine flavoured hookahs are not manufactured, distributed advertised or sold.
- ▶▶ Following this, 15 States, including Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir and Mizoram have banned them. Several of the bans were under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act or the Poisons Act, under which nicotine was included as a ‘poison’.
- ▶▶ Further, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (Anti-Smuggling Unit) and the Drug Controller General of India directed all their officials to ensure compliance with the advisory.

## Why E-Cigarettes Have Been So Popular?

- ▶▶ Introduced about 10 years ago in India, e-cigarettes rapidly gained popularity, especially among the youth. This is due to the misconception among students, parents and teachers that these cigarettes are free of nicotine also contributed to their appeal.
- ▶▶ The reality is that the tobacco industry, hit by the success of the state’s efforts to reduce tobacco use otherwise, had developed such products to hold on to customers who would have otherwise quit.
- ▶▶ Research suggests that many youngsters, who would otherwise have never started using nicotine, took up conventional smoking after being introduced to e-cigarettes.
- ▶▶ While the tobacco companies promote e-cigarettes as a ‘less risky’ smoking option, some industry documents show that their real goal is to introduce ENDS products as an alternative to quitting.
- ▶▶ E-cigarettes are being popularised by promising that it will give the consumers the pleasure of smoking any time anywhere. (suggesting that they could use the product even at public places, where smoking is banned).
- ▶▶ The tobacco industry plans to expand by achieving these twin objectives — attracting more youngsters and reducing quitting by adults.
- ▶▶ After all, the industry’s end goal is profit and not improvement in health indicators.

- ▶▶ The fact that the industry continues to produce and sell conventional cigarettes, its flagship product that brings it the greatest amount of profit, despite marketing e-cigarettes as an alternative is evidence enough of its sinister design.

### Myths and Reality:

- ▶▶ First, the industry says that ENDS products provide a safer alternative to conventional cigarettes. But a recent white paper by the ICMR and several other research studies have contradicted several claims of the industry.
- ▶▶ The reality is that ENDS users are almost at the same risk of contracting lung diseases and cancer as conventional cigarette users. In fact, 'dual users' are at greater risk of heart attacks.
- ▶▶ Secondly, the industry claims that the sale of ENDS products does not violate any regulations despite the fact that the companies are in clear violation of WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which prohibits the sale of any product that appeals to minors. The marketing of ENDS products, targeted at youth, also impacts minors and schoolchildren.
- ▶▶ The industry's assertion that e-cigarettes are safe is contradicted by the many fires and explosions caused by devices, resulting in injuries, loss of lives and property.
- ▶▶ Further, their accidental ingestion by children has also caused some deaths.

### Way Ahead:

- ▶▶ It is clear that the Central government has shown great foresight in bringing out the ban proposal, a move that is likely to avoid causing another epidemic of nicotine addiction in the country.
- ▶▶ But due care has to be taken that this ban applies to all forms of ENDS products, including all 'heat-not-burn' devices that profess to be an alternative to the existing tobacco products.

**Source- The Hindu**