



Huff and e-puff

Posted at: 14/08/2018

Highlights

In a recent hearing on a public interest litigation in the Delhi High Court, the Delhi government said it was planning to ban e-cigarettes, if it follows through, the NCT will join States such as Karnataka and Maharashtra in the ban.

Is a ban the right approach to regulate this technology, given that combustible cigarettes are freely available across India?

- The controversy exists partly because it is a new and rapidly evolving technology making it hard for researchers to study the health effects.
- The evidence so far indicates that e-cigarettes are safer than combustible cigarettes as they heat a liquid to generate a nicotine-containing aerosol, instead of burning tobacco, they do not produce toxic tars.
- That doesn't mean they are completely safe. At high temperatures, e-cigarettes produce carcinogens such as formaldehyde, although these are fewer in number compared to regular cigarettes.
- They also increase the odds of lung disease and myocardial infarction, but to a lesser extent than normal cigarettes do.

Recent surveys also show that e-cigarettes can act as a gateway drug for young people.

Way Forward

- Completely banning the technology, while selling normal cigarettes, could take away a promising smoking-cessation aid.
- A more pragmatic option would be to regulate e-cigarettes tightly, by creating standards for the aerosols and banning underage and public use.
- This would leave smokers with a therapeutic alternative, while protecting youngsters from a gateway drug.

Either way, conflicting evidence makes it a tough call for policymakers.

The Hindu