



## **Immediate Government Action to Enforce Act 852 Needed Amid Alarming Rise in Youth Vaping**

The Malaysian Thoracic Society (MTS) and Lung Foundation Malaysia (LFM) urgently call upon the federal government and the Ministry of Health to prioritize the full and immediate enforcement of the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852). Swift action is vital to combat the escalating health crisis driven by electronic-cigarette (e-cigarette) and vape use—particularly among Malaysia’s youth.

### **Targeting the Next Generation**

We are deeply concerned about the deliberate targeting of children and teenagers through the marketing of brightly coloured, toy-like vaping devices that resemble lighters, USB drives, and candy, disguising the serious risks of nicotine addiction behind a playful façade. This is not harm-reduction; it is youth recruitment.

Adding to these concerns, educators and counsellors now warn that vaping is becoming “a gateway to drug addiction.” Reports highlight students progressing from flavoured e-cigarettes to illicit substances after forming nicotine habits, with school drug-testing data showing an uptick in positive results for THC and other drugs among regular vapers.<sup>1</sup> The trend underscores how easily curiosity about vaping can evolve into broader substance abuse, compounding the public health threat.

The industry’s tactics are working: the 2022 National Health & Morbidity Survey (NHMS) found that while cigarette smoking among teens declined, vaping prevalence among Malaysian adolescents soared to 14.9 percent, including 9.6 percent among girls—a nearly five-fold jump from 2017.<sup>2</sup>

### **Mounting Health and Economic Costs**

Between 2019 and 2024, the Ministry of Health recorded 41 cases of e-cigarette or vaping-associated lung injury (EVALI), each costing about RM 150,000 in treatment. If left unchecked, the annual cost to treat such cases is projected to reach RM 369 million by 2030.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Legal Tools Already Exist—What’s Missing Is Enforcement**

Act 852 already provides robust mechanisms to regulate tobacco and substitute products:

- Section 3 mandates product registration, giving the government control over market access;

- Section 21 empowers the Minister of Health to restrict or ban harmful products in the interest of public health.

Yet these provisions remain ineffective without timely gazettment and enforcement of supporting Regulations. We urge the Ministry of Health to accelerate this process without delay.

## **Commending State Action—But Federal Leadership Is Essential**

MTS and LFM commend proactive state-level initiatives in Johor, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Perlis, which have implemented restrictions on vape sales. Yet without consistent federal enforcement, such efforts remain fragmented and insufficient to address a national epidemic.

## **Our Call to Action**

Given the clear and present danger posed by unregulated vape use, MTS and LFM call on the federal government and the Ministry of Health to:

1. Immediately gazette and enforce Regulations under Act 852 to curb the proliferation of vaping products;
2. Take firm action against predatory marketing targeting Malaysian youth, including banning toy-like devices;
3. Support and expand state-level restrictions to achieve a coordinated national response;
4. Reject industry narratives of harm reduction that ignore the reality of youth addiction and public-health costs.

We must act now—before more young Malaysians fall prey to nicotine addiction, and before the long-term healthcare burden becomes irreversible.

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## **References**

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