Scientific Opinion: Recommendation Against E-Cigarette Flavour Bans

A flavour ban cannot substantially decrease youth use of e-cigarettes because curiosity is the primary motivation for youth to experiment with e-cigarettes. A 2016 German survey reported that 73.1% of 14 to 19 year olds said curiosity was their motivation to try e-cigarettes [1]. A 2018 survey of French 15-16 year olds found curiosity to be the most common reason for trying e-cigarettes [2]. The United States National Youth Tobacco Survey 2019 reported that 56.1% endorsed curiosity as their major reason for trying e-cigarettes, and 23.9% stated that e-cigarette use by peers or family was their motivation, with flavours ranking third at one in five [3].

Another attraction for youth use of e-cigarettes is playing tricks with the vapour – "vape tricks" - the same type of activity as blowing smoke rings. A US survey indicated that 54.4% of experimenters did vape tricks [4]. Although there is no study on Dutch youth, a survey of Dutch adult e-cigarette users found that 24.6% enjoyed doing vape tricks [5].

Furthermore, youth who use flavoured e-cigarettes are less likely to take up smoking than youth who use tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes. A large US study of youth e-cigarette users demonstrated that over five years youth using flavoured e-cigarettes were 34% less likely to start smoking than youth who used tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes [6].

In the Netherlands 43.8% of adults who smoke use e-cigarettes for their quit attempt [7]. A flavour ban will certainly reduce the number of adults who will successfully quit smoking by substituting e-cigarettes for cigarettes. A US study calculated that adults under 55 years old who used non-tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes were 228% more successful at quitting smoking than adults who used tobacco flavoured e-cigarettes [6]. Another study found that adults who quit smoking with flavoured e-cigarettes were 283% more successful at being quit for one year or more than adults who used tobacco-flavoured e-cigarettes [8].

Current evidence compiled by the highly respected *Cochrane Review* conclusively demonstrates that e-cigarettes are an effective cessation aid [9]. A ban on e-cigarette flavours will substantially decrease their effectiveness at helping people to quit smoking. A ban on e-cigarette flavours will jeopardize the health outcomes for nearly half of the adults in the Netherlands who are trying to quit smoking.

The stated goal of enacting an e-cigarette flavour ban is to deter youth from trying them. Unfortunately a flavour ban is no panacea for reducing youth experimentation with e-cigarettes. Curiosity and playing vape tricks will continue to motivate youth experimentation even in the absence of flavoured e-cigarettes. Adequate health education and strict enforcement of bans of sales to youth are effective measures to reduce youth use of e-cigarettes.

Therefore, we strongly recommend against a ban on e-cigarette flavours. The projected outcome of a ban would be that substantially fewer adults in the Netherlands will be successful at quitting smoking and only a very small number of youth will be deterred from e-cigarette experimentation.

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