

# Don: Ban vaping in private varsities too

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**PETALING JAYA:** The ban on vaping in public universities should also be extended to private colleges and universities, says a behavioural change expert.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's associate professor Dr Wee Lei Hum said vaping did not address the problem of nicotine addiction but drew in new users instead.

She said young people tended to follow their peers and shifted from one habit to another.

"Since vaping has been banned in public universities, it should also be banned in private universities as well. Schools should also be smoke and vape-free," said Dr Lee who is a smoking cessation and behavioural change specialist.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh announced last week that electronic cigarettes and tobacco smoking were banned at all 20 public universities in the country.

The ministry's director-general Prof Datuk Dr Asma Ismail said private colleges and universities were encouraged to ban e-cigarettes.

"We hope that they would also adopt the decision that was made by the public universities," said Dr Asma who is also the Registrar General for Private Institutions.

She said the ban on vaping in public universities was in line with the green objective of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr Wee said the latest survey on vaping in universities showed that half the students who used e-cigarettes had no intention to quit while the other half hoped to quit in future but their commitments were weak

A total of 138 students, aged between 18 and 24 from four private universities in the Klang Valley, took part in the survey.

She said data collected from the student vapers between September and November showed that 68.1% were smokers or had smoked before and 31.9% were new nicotine users.

"More than 60% who said they had the intention to quit had vaped from a month to over a year, signifying their lack of seriousness to quit," said Dr Wee.

She said 34.7% of respondents who used e-cigarettes to inhale nicotine needed to vape within 10 minutes after waking up, indicating that the participants were dependent on an addictive substance.

As for 44 of the respondents who were smokers but only vapers, 17 or 38.6% they would continue vaping while 26 or 59.1% said they would stop in the future.

Dr Wee said a ban was necessary because treating young smokers was challenging as they seldom stepped forward to seek help to quit, adding that cessation among them was low.

"This could be because the risks are not clear for them to relate to, while the craving for nicotine and withdrawal symptoms are immediate," she said.

She said the influence of peers was particularly powerful among the young.

In Johor Baru, Deputy Education Minister Chong Sin Woon said schools should do spot checks to prevent vaping among primary and secondary students from becoming "uncontrollable".

He said the ministry regarded the issue of students vaping very seriously and urged schools to take appropriate action.