

Education and Balance key to NZ Smokefree 2025 – Draft for 2019

Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ (ARFNZ) marks World Smoke Free Day this Friday 31st May with a call for more education to the public on vaping and e-cigarettes.

The Foundation stresses that the promotion of e-cigarettes being a healthier alternative to cigarette smoking needs to be a balanced discussion.

Letitia O’Dwyer, CEO of ARFNZ comments: “We applaud the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) on advising that vaping could assist some people to stop smoking when provided with behavioural support, but we also hope that the educational information recognises that these products are not without harm themselves.”

The Foundation also highlights the lack of consultation with respiratory physicians throughout the development of the educational information for the public, “ARFNZ has repeatedly requested that a practicing respiratory physician who sees patients with respiratory conditions and is a member of The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) be appointed to both the MoH and HPA advisory panels – but this never happened” Letitia comments.

This lack of consultation has now been viewed as “biased” towards suppliers and retailers of vaping products, Letitia adds, “It seems to be a real conflict of interest, to have people involved with the international electronic cigarette industry, vaping business owners, and retail store managers who specialise in selling these products being decision makers as to what educational material goes out to the public.”

Dr Stuart Jones, President of the Thoracic Society and Medical Director of the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation adds, “We must remember that these vaping and e-cigarette devices are consumer products and none of them have been through the rigorous assessment required to be a medical product. The 95% safer claim that these companies state is also unsubstantiated, basing this statistic off an old paper with limited scientific evidence, and therefore should not be used when promoting e-cigarettes.”

To balance the discussion, **Dr Jones** requests that the findings of current and ongoing research be considered when encouraging vaping as an alternative to smoking, “Although less harmful than cigarettes, we now have a growing body of evidence that these devices do cause inflammation and damage the airways, in different ways to traditional smoking. Additionally, these products should only be used for smoking cessation after proven medical therapies have been **tried and failed, paired with behavioural support**. It is also essential that when using vaping devices as a cessation product that there is a complete switch to avoid dual use of cigarettes and vaping, as this can potentially end up harming the airways further.”

ARFNZ also wants the government to consider the 87% of non-smoking adults ¹ (15 years + as per ASH website) who may be affected by the second hand vape that these vaping devices emit, “If the Smoke Free Environments Act doesn’t apply to vaping or e-cigarettes, this means that the 1 in 8 adults with a chronic respiratory condition within New Zealand could be exposed to vape while at an outdoor event or restaurant – and that may worsen their condition” Letitia states.

Letitia continues, “Of course we are committed to Smokefree 2025, but we also encourage a vape-free nation. One product should not simply be replacing the other, as both products are not without harm to the lungs.”

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1. Ministry of Health. (2018). *Annual Update of Key Results 2017/18: New Zealand Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.