



Quitting tobacco feels like 100 people working in your brain who suddenly lose their daily bonus from the boss. They will definitely go on strike.

Mai Jiawei

A senior high school student

“Five students among the 2,000 or so in my school have been found vaping ‘milk tea cup’ e-cigarettes,” a local high school teacher surnamed Ren complained in an online post.

He said the cartoony appearance of the products and their fruit flavors were attracting other students to follow suit.

Wei Wenfeng, a popular livestream host who tests the quality of children’s products, castigated manufacturers who deliberately design e-cigarettes as cute, snack-like toys.

“Where is your conscience?” asked Wei in one of his recent programs, which was viewed by over a million users on Douyin.

According to the tests conducted by Wei’s team, an e-cigarette that claimed to be “gas gum” is comprised of a battery, an atomizer and unknown liquid. Lab analysis found the liquid contains nicotine and the carcinogen formaldehyde, along with other ingredients that can harm the brain development of teens.

One 19-year-old woman posted on Douban that she has become short of breath when climbing stairs after just three years of vaping.

“Quit as fast as you can,” she urged in the post.

A “milk-tea” e-cigarette user surnamed Chen told China Youth Daily that he was mainly attracted by the fruit flavor of the products.

“Most e-cigarette users dislike the taste of tobacco,” he said.

Chen said he had bought three “milk tea cups” from WeChat retailers. Most online retailers don’t check ages. Some online vendors even made overtures to him about becoming an “agent” to promote the products to schoolmates, dangling the idea as very profitable.

“Profits from e-cigarettes are huge, and many manufacturers are willing to risk legal repercussions because they want a share of that pot,” said Chen Zhong, an e-cigarette industry insider.

China has the world’s largest population of smokers and is the largest producer and consumer of tobacco. Adolescent exposure to e-cigarette is being blamed for the growing number of Chinese smokers.

China’s Ministry of Finance recently increased the tax rate on the production and import of e-cigarettes to over 40 percent, causing retail prices to jump.

Over 70 percent of legal e-cigarette retailers in October complained that they can no longer make ends meet, while only 7 percent said they still were showing profits, according to an online survey released by domestic research institute Bluehole.

The more the government cracks down on e-cigarettes, the more the trade goes underground, Chen said.

WDG, a Shenzhen-based e-cigarette brand, announced in August that it had stopped the production of all fruit-flavored e-cigarettes, but it admits fake products are still rampant.

“Four manufacturers are producing about 10,000 fake WDG ‘milk tea cup’ e-cigarettes every day,” an official of the company said. “But they are difficult to trace because most of their transactions are made through WeChat or QQ.”

Tobacco authorities in multiple cities have begun crackdowns on illegal production and sales of flavored and “disguised” e-cigarettes.

“Both the illegal manufacturers and agents will be punished and severe violations could lead to criminal charges,” an official with the Shenzhen Tobacco Monopoly Bureau said.

