

## LETTER

# Africa needs stricter vaping regulations to protect its young people from nicotine dependence

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Dear Editor,

E-cigarettes, also known as vapes, are electronic devices that supply nicotine in the form of vapor.<sup>1</sup>The liquid in e-cigarettes contain addictive flavours that are particularly appealing to youths.<sup>2</sup>E-cigarettes are marketed as less harmful than combustible cigarettes<sup>3</sup>; however, research evidence shows that vaping (e-cigarette use) may lead to higher risk of nicotine addiction, continued use, and myriads of debilitating health conditions including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, brain diseases, and lung diseases.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

Nicotine has harmful effects, especially on the developing brains of young people.<sup>4</sup>Globally, the rate at which youths, especially in Africa, are vaping calls for stricter vaping regulations to address this public health crisis.<sup>7</sup>Worrisomely, recent reports

from Africa have posited that African countries may eventually have a disproportionate share of the current global burden of vaping 'epidemic'.<sup>8</sup>This therefore underscores the need for immediate and stricter regulatory measures on e-cigarettes in Africa. Unlike many African countries, the United States, Australia, and several European and Asian countries currently have stringent measures that regulate the contents, advertisements, sales, and use of e-cigarettes in their countries; these measures have profoundly restricted their youths from e-cigarette use.<sup>3</sup>

The youths form about 60% of the African population.<sup>9</sup>Unfortunately, the current lack of strict regulations on e-cigarettes in several African countries poses a significant threat to the well-being of this population group. To curb this threat, stricter regulations on e-cigarettes, including bans on sales to youth under the age of 21 years should be enacted as a protective measure in every African country.<sup>9</sup>

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Other strict regulations such as outright ban on e-cigarettes sales in school premises and residential areas should also be enforced in order to prevent youth from gaining easy access to e-cigarettes. This, perhaps, is an effective strategy that can be used in reducing the initiation and continued use of e-cigarettes among youths in Africa.<sup>1,10</sup> Furthermore, stricter approaches such as flavour restrictions, heavy taxations, and highly restricted marketing can also be adopted, as these approaches have been found to be also effective in combating the rise of vaping.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, African governments need to adopt more comprehensive laws and policies to protect their youths. Additionally, robust efforts should be made to curb the trend of illicit trade of e-cigarettes, such as the criminalization of such trades.

In conclusion, the implementation of the above-identified comprehensive measures requires a collaborative approach between the government and public health organizations. It is important to prioritize the health of the continent's young people to curb the spread of vaping and prevent them from getting addicted to nicotine. The prosperity of Africa lies in the energy and creativity of its youth.

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