

Hong Kong to impose full ban on e-cigarettes and other new tobacco products

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Hong Kong is set to impose a complete ban on e-cigarettes and other new tobacco products in an unexpected U-turn by the government, which had previously proposed only to restrict their sale to minors.

The initiative will be announced by Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor in her policy address on Wednesday, as she responds to myriad social concerns with nearly 250 initiatives aimed at tackling issues such as housing, land supply, health care, welfare and livelihood.

Sources told the *Post* the ban would cover electronic cigarettes as well as other new tobacco alternatives such as heat-not-burn products and herbal cigarettes.

Until now, the government had committed only to regulating e-cigarettes in the same way as conventional tobacco products, but health minister Sophia Chan Siu-chee had left the door open for “more stringent measures” depending on what medical evidence had to say about health effects.



However, a source familiar with the Food and Health Bureau expressed shock at the move, saying the previous administration had listed many technical problems with implementing a full ban.

Former health chief Dr Ko Wing-man had intended to introduce a total ban in 2016, but studies by related departments suggested that such a move would be “quite problematic”.

The previous year the government proposed a full ban on e-cigarettes, meaning prohibition of the import, manufacture, sale, distribution and advertising of such products. But the plan was watered down when a legislative proposal came out in June this year.

Stubbing out demand: sale of e-cigarettes set to be regulated

Worldwide, the use of e-cigarettes – known as vaping – has become a multibillion-dollar industry with hundreds of brands. In Hong Kong, vaping products are found in trendy shopping malls frequented by youngsters in areas such as Mong Kok and Causeway Bay, and cost between HK\$100 (US\$12.80) and HK\$500.

The tobacco trade was quick to criticise the proposed ban.



Christine Hu, spokeswoman of the Coalition on Tobacco Affairs, an umbrella group of tobacco producers, said on Tuesday night that she was upset by the proposal because it would only boost illicit products in the underground market and failed to protect those under age 18.

"We are disappointed by the government's selective and blind adoption of views expressed by certain groups, and ignored opinions from the industry and scientific data [about the products] from overseas," she said.

On Tuesday, Lam said she would keep her speech short, leaving the details in a document that was about a fifth longer than her maiden policy blueprint last year. She will address Hong Kong's legislature at about 11am, before a press conference in the afternoon, for which she is setting aside more time.

The cover of her speech booklet is sky blue, like last year's, matching the colour she used in her campaign for Hong Kong's top job.

Lam's administration released a progress report on its achievements on Tuesday afternoon, claiming to have implemented 78 measures introduced in last year's policy address.

The report summed up the headway made in 10 "people-oriented initiatives", including provisions for more assistance to patients with uncommon diseases and the building of new public wet markets.

But it did not touch on pressing issues such as housing and land supply, and some lawmakers said progress on key social welfare and innovation issues had been "far too slow".

Lam revealed her government had received 12,800 submissions from the public for Wednesday's address, a third of which were about housing and land supply.

Island of hope: for crowded Hong Kong, a huge new island will be game changer

The *Post* has reported that as part of Lam's plans to ease the city's housing crisis, she is expected to set aside 70 per cent of new land, including a 1,000-hectare artificial island to be reclaimed to the east of Lantau, for public rental and subsidised housing.

She is also expected to speed up development of a new town in the northern New Territories, making 200 hectares of brownfield sites available much earlier for housing and other projects.

The policy address will also offer incentives to the maritime industry, including companies offering support services to shipping firms, to encourage them to make Hong Kong their base.

On innovation, the government is expected to announce details of plans to pair local universities with internationally renowned research institutions to develop more advanced research in biomedical technology, artificial intelligence and robotics.

The *Post* reported two weeks ago that the government had earmarked a Kwun Tong site for an academy to train 180,000 civil servants to improve the delivery of public services, an initiative the chief executive announced in her policy address last year.

Lam will provide an update on preparations for the civil service college when she speaks on Wednesday.

A person familiar with the plan said the government had identified a “government, institution or community” site near Kwun Tong MTR station for the civil service college.

The Hong Kong Student Aid Society runs Holland Hostel, which provides residential services for young people, on the Kwun Tong site.

“The government is planning to redevelop the site to accommodate the future civil service college, and the social service facilities currently on the site,” the person said.

The college, which will focus on developing civil servants’ leadership and public communications abilities, will be modelled after similar institutions overseas, such as the Civil Service College of Singapore and the Australia and New Zealand School of Government.

Additional reporting by Danny Mok