

By RYAN JASLOW / CBS NEWS / May 31, 2013, 3:15 PM

## France to ban electronic cigarettes in public amid health risk uncertainty

Electronic cigarettes are sometimes seen getting puffed in bars, restaurants and offices, but that soon won't be the case in France.

**Reuters** is reporting France plans to expand its 2007 ban on smoking in public places to include electronic cigarettes as well, amid concerns over the public health impact of the smokeless alternative.

"I have decided that the measures which apply to tobacco will also be extended to electronic cigarettes," France's Health Minister Marisol Touraine said at a press conference today, according to **Agence France-Presse**. The press conference was to mark World No Tobacco Day, an international effort to raise awareness for smoking's dangers.

An estimated 6 million people are killed by tobacco each year, according to the **World Health Organization**, while about 600,000 people die annually from exposure to secondhand smoke.

Electronic cigarettes have gained popularity in recent years. A February 2013 study of American smokers found about 21 percent of U.S. adults smoked e-cigs in 2011 (the last year data was obtained), a 10 percent increase over the previous year, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** reported.

"E-cigarette use is growing rapidly," CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden said at the time. "There is still a lot we don't know about these products, including whether they will decrease or increase use of traditional cigarettes."

Specifically, the impact of e-cigarettes on long-term health still needs to be studied, though they appear to have fewer toxins than traditional smokes. Health officials are also curious whether e-cigarettes could increase use of real cigarettes.

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France shared similar concerns, and factored them into the new ban, according to Reuters.

"This is no ordinary product because it encourages mimicking and could promote taking up smoking," Touraine said at press conference, according to Reuters.

A government report this week in France found about 500,000 French citizens have started smoking e-cigarettes. The report, however, advised against an outright ban on them, saying they still seemed safer than smoking tobacco.

"If they ban it in public or in the workplace, I'll be closing my store, or moving it somewhere where there aren't restrictions like that," Darren Moon, the British owner of online store Vapshop.fr, told **the Daily Mail**. "Twenty percent of our business is selling disposable e-cigarettes to restaurants, clubs, bars and hotels. So if there's a workplace ban, I'd have to start firing people."

E-cigarettes are currently banned in Colombia, Panama and Uruguay, AFP reported.

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