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Electronic cigarettes safer than tobacco, says ministry

By [Martin Johnston](#)

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Fake electronic cigarettes don't de-normalise smoking, say health experts. Photo / Janna Dixon

The Ministry of Health has stated that electronic cigarettes are "far safer" than smoking tobacco.

The statement – made to MPs – has been welcomed by End Smoking trust chairman Dr Murray Laugesen, who is investigating e-cigarettes as a quit-smoking tool.

"End Smoking NZ congratulates the NZ ministry on possibly being the first ministry of health to concede e-cigarettes are safer than smoking."

E-cigarettes are battery-powered devices that can deliver nicotine in a vapour mist, rather than in tobacco smoke. There is debate on whether they should be legally treated as a "recreational" product like tobacco, or as a medicine to help people quit smoking.

The ministry considers them an unapproved medicine and says their distribution would be an offence.

It also told the health select committee: "As the e-cigarette delivers only nicotine ... without the 4000 or so other chemicals in tobacco smoke, it is far safer than smoking."

"The risks to smokers of pure nicotine, delivered in doses seen with the e-cigarette and nicotine replacement therapy products, are extremely low."

However, the ministry said research questions needed to be answered before it could support the e-cigarette's introduction and trials were needed on its safety and its effectiveness as a quit-smoking device.

"It does raise issues about the social approval of such devices and does run counter to one of the objectives of the [Smokefree Environments] Act and this bill, which is to de-normalise smoking."

E-cigarettes are in a legal grey area and Dr Laugesen considers the ministry is operating a "virtual ban" on their sale.

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