

Singapore clamps down on shisha smoking

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The Singapore government said Tuesday it would phase out public shisha smoking to protect young people who feel that smoking tobacco through water pipes is less harmful than cigarettes.

Faishal Ibrahim, parliamentary secretary for the health ministry, told a legislative session that a ban on new licences for shisha imports and sales would come into force this month.

Existing importers and retailers will be given until July 2016 to shift to other businesses.

"In view of the health risks associated with shisha [smoking](#) and to prevent the proliferation and entrenchment of shisha smoking in Singapore, my ministry intends to prohibit the import, distribution and sale of shisha," Faishal told lawmakers.

Faishal said government surveys showed the proportion of students using alternative tobacco products had increased from two percent in 2009 to nine percent in 2012.

The minimum age for smoking in Singapore, including at shisha bars and cafes, is 18. The shisha is also known as a hookah.

"Due to the sweet-smelling smoke and passing of the smoke through water in the apparatus, there are often misconceptions that shisha smoking is less harmful and addictive," Faishal said.

Singapore's Muslim quarter, known as Kampong Glam, is a popular haunt for shisha smokers, with dozens of establishments offering a shared smoke outdoors at prices starting from around Sg\$15 (\$12).

Experts have warned that since it takes longer to smoke than a cigarette, a shisha is more dangerous.

Singapore, renowned for its tough social controls, already bans smoking in indoor public areas as well as a long list of outdoor public places.

It is one of the costliest cities to buy cigarettes, with a pack of Marlboros costing around Sg\$12. Electronic cigarettes are banned.

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