A new type of cigarette is showing up in places where cigarettes have long been banned – like offices, restaurants and other public spaces. Ads for these new cigarettes are also popping up on American TV. This is surprising because traditional cigarette commercials have been banned since 1970.

These new cigarettes wear a modern, electronic disguise. They are called e-cigarettes, and employers and governments are struggling to adapt to them. Like traditional cigarettes, they deliver a dose of nicotine. This is the addictive substance in tobacco. Traditional cigarettes burn tobacco to release nicotine, but e-cigarettes do not contain tobacco.

Some health experts are pressing for more restrictions on e-cigarettes, out of safety concerns. They fear the popularity of the devices will undo gains made in the war on smoking. But other medical experts see e-cigarettes as the best tool to help people quit smoking.

**The Situation**

There are about 70 countries that regulate e-cigarettes. Cambodia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates don't allow them at all. Twenty-six countries, including Brazil, Greece and Thailand, do not allow the sale of e-cigarettes. Twenty-one countries, such as Belgium, Honduras and the Philippines, do not allow e-cigarettes in enclosed public spaces or on public transportation, like buses or subways. In the United States, eight states and more than 500 cities and counties also have this rule.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced the first national e-cigarette regulations in mid-2016. The FDA banned e-cigarettes sales to people under the age of 18. The regulations also ban free samples of e-cigarettes, and require nicotine-addiction warnings on e-cigarette packaging. In the European Union, there are e-cigarette regulations that ban advertising and limit how much nicotine an e-cigarette can contain.

The research company Euromonitor estimated global sales of e-cigarettes and related items at more than $5 billion in 2015. This is up from $2.8 billion in 2014. The devices are sold by big tobacco companies such as Altria and Reynolds American, as well as by smaller, specialty producers like the Miami-based V2 Cigs. Some analysts think increased costs associated with new regulations will push smaller competitors out of the market.

In the United Kingdom, a professional medical group known as the Royal College of Physicians released a report on e-cigarettes in 2016. It warned that the involvement of tobacco companies in the e-cigarette business threatens smoking-reduction efforts. The interest of tobacco sellers lies in marketing e-cigarettes as a companion to regular cigarettes, rather than a substitute for them, it said.

**The Background**

A Chinese pharmacist and smoker named Hon Lik gets credit for developing the e-cigarette in 2003. It went on sale in the U.S. and Europe in 2006.

E-cigarettes take many forms. They come in various colors and contain different levels of nicotine. Early versions of e-cigarettes looked like regular cigarettes or sleek, metallic tubes. More recent models are more like elaborate pipes. They all work the same way: A battery heats nicotine liquid. The liquid comes in flavors ranging from tobacco to bubble gum to cinnamon cookie. The puffer inhales nicotine and exhales vapor, the gas form of the liquid. This is why the popular nickname for e-cigarette smokers is "vapers." There's no burning tobacco, so e-cigarettes do not have smoke or tar like regular cigarettes.

**The Argument**

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is among the health groups that say e-cigarettes may encourage young people to start smoking cigarettes, especially because some ads feature famous people who make vaping look cool. A U.S. government survey of teenagers recorded a significant increase in the use of e-cigarettes from 2011 to 2015. The rise was counterbalanced by a drop in the use of regular tobacco products.

The Royal College of Physicians' report concluded that e-cigarettes were used in the United Kingdom almost exclusively by people who were already smokers. These smokers were using e-cigarettes to reduce harm to themselves or others caused by traditional cigarettes, the report said.

A physician-run trial compared e-cigarettes to nicotine patches, a common tool for smokers trying to quit. The trial found that vaping may be as effective as nicotine patches in quitting smoking.

The practice of vaping is too new for there to be a significant body of research on long-term health complications. The effects on humans of nicotine without tobacco are not well-studied. Trials have not shown an association between nicotine gum and cancer, or negative effects from the use of nicotine patches. However, e-cigarette devices contain metal which can show up in vapor as particles. These particles are small enough to be breathed in. The level of danger remains unclear.