The Dilemma with e-cigarettes

What is the issue?

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- There are conflicting claims about health effects of 3-cigarettes.
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- Hence, Indian policy makers should tread cautiously in this regard.
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How does India’s policy landscape on e-cigarettes look?

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- Recently, the Delhi government stated in court that it was planning to ban e-cigarettes in its territory due to its likely health implications.
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- Significantly, Karnataka and Maharashtra have already banned e-cigarettes and the “Union Health Ministry” has also taken a stand against it.
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- But as combustible cigarettes are freely available throughout India, there are concerns on whether an outright ban against e-cigars is the right move.
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- Notably, “e-cigar” is a new technology, and its long term health effects aren’t known yet, but there are indications that they are better than conventional cigarettes.
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What are the health implications of e-cigars?

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- Instead of burning tobacco, e-cigars heat a liquid to generate a nicotine-containing aerosol that does not produce toxic tars.
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- But this doesn’t mean they are completely safe, as at high temperatures, e-

cigarettes produce carcinogens such as formaldehyde.
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- They also increase the odds of lung disease and myocardial infarction.
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- Nonetheless, its carcinogenic and other health implications are believed to be lesser than for normal cigarettes, although long-term data isn't available.
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What is the dilemma about?

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- **Positives -** Some researchers argued that e-cigarettes must be viewed from a "harm minimisation" perspective as they are a better alternative.
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- Given that combustible cigarettes are more noxious than electronic ones, switching from the former to the latter can help addicts to lead healthier lives.
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- **Negatives -** But others feel the need to adopt a precautionary approach as e-cigarettes is a young technology, whose long term effects aren't known.
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- Further, some carcinogens in e-cigarettes have already been discovered to have a non-linear effect (even small quantities having big effects) on cancer.
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- There is also the risk of e-cigarettes acting as a gateway drug for young people and surveys have indicated that e-cigars are likely to increase addictions.
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- Further, due to its branding as a healthier alternative it may end up promoting the habit of smoking.
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What is the way ahead?

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- Completely banning the technology, while selling normal cigarettes, could take away a promising smoking-cessation aid.
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- A more pragmatic option would be to regulate e-cigarettes tightly, by creating standards for the aerosols and banning underage and public use.

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- This would leave smokers with a therapeutic alternative, while protecting youngsters from a gateway drug.
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- Either ways, conflicting evidence makes it a tough call for policymakers and India should tread cautiously.
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Source: The Hindu

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