

France seeks to stamp out first e-joint (Update)

December 16 2014, by Olivier Thibault

France sought to stamp out a new electronic cigarette containing cannabis, launched Tuesday with the claim it provides all of the relaxation but none of the mind-altering effects of marijuana.

Health Minister Marisol Touraine said the product would "incite the consumption of cannabis" and that she intended calling on the courts to ban it.

"I am opposed to such a product being commercialised in France," she said on RTL radio.

The product was launched by a French-Czech company called Kanavape which says it hopes to offer "millions of people a legal and flavourful way to consume cannabis".

Smoking e-cigarettes, or "vaping", is fashionable in France, and while people have long since figured out how to doctor them to smoke marijuana—as evidenced by hundreds of YouTube how-to's on the subject—Kanavape claims its product is 100-percent legal.

Antonin Cohen, one of the two producers of the Kanavape, told journalists at the launch that it "has no psychotic or psychotropic effects and cannot be considered an alternative to a joint".

The company extracts cannabidiol—a compound in cannabis that does not contain the mind-altering THC ingredient—from hemp, a variety of

cannabis grown for fibre and seeds.

"Kanavape is a hemp vaporiser, a variety which has no recreational use because it does not contain THC," or Tetrahydrocannabinol, which creates euphoria by stimulating cells in the brain to release dopamine, said Cohen.

The hemp is grown on farms in France, Spain and the Czech Republic without chemicals or fertiliser, the company says on its website.

"The virtues of cannabidiol are many, particularly with benefits for stress, relaxation, sleep," the company said.

Cohen said the concentration of the extract was very low and that the product was aimed "at consumers of electronic cigarettes and people who smoke tobacco or other substances".

Experts raise doubts

Addiction specialists and even members of the pro-medical marijuana lobby were sceptical about Kanavape.

"They are just releasing a product for buzz, to attract attention," said Fabienne Lopez, the head of an association which promotes the medical use of cannabis.

She expressed reservations about the therapeutic effects of the product, fearing it could create confusion among those who were seriously ill and looking for pain relief.

According to the French Observatory for Drugs and Addiction, some 1.2 million people in France regularly smoke cannabis, that is more than 10 times a month.

Recreational use of marijuana is still illegal in France, however the country now allows the drug's active ingredients to be used for medical purposes.

In January a mouth spray used to treat multiple sclerosis (MS) symptoms called Sativex which contained both THC and cannabidiol became the first cannabis-derived drug approved in the country.

Touraine has sought to crack down on e-cigarette use and in May announced they would face the same restrictions as normal tobacco, such as a ban on advertising, no sale to under-18s and a ban on their use in public spaces.

First marketed in China in 2004, the e-cigarette has a diode that heats up flavoured liquid, which often contains nicotine, into a vapour that is inhaled, much like traditional cigarettes but without the smoke.

The argument in favour of the devices is that they do not have the tar, ash and toxins found in conventional cigarettes.

However recent research by Japanese scientists found that e-cigarettes contain up to 10 times the level of cancer-causing agents in regular tobacco such as formaldehyde and acetaldehyde.

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