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E-Cigarette Bans Take Effect in New York City, Chicago.

Laws in New York and Chicago making electronic cigarettes subject to the same regulations as tobacco are taking effect, and their sellers and users are steadfast in their opposition.

The New York ban — along with the measure in Chicago, one that previously went into effect in Los Angeles and federal regulations proposed last week — are keeping debate smoldering among public health officials, the e-cigarette industry and users.

Proponents of the bans which began Tuesday say they are aimed at preventing the re-acceptance of smoking as a societal norm, particularly among teenagers who could see the tobacco-free electronic cigarettes, with their candy-like flavorings and celebrity endorsers, as a gateway to cancer-causing tobacco products.

Dr. Thomas Farley, the New York City health commissioner under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg, says allowing electronic cigarettes in bars and restaurants would undermine existing bans on tobacco-based products.

“Imagine for a moment you’re at a bar and there are 20 people who are puffing on something that looks like a cigarette and then somebody smells something that smells like tobacco smoke,” Farley says. “How’s the bartender going to know who to tap on the shoulder and say, ‘Put that out’?”

Makers of the devices say marketing them as e-cigarettes has confused lawmakers into thinking they are the same as tobacco-based cigarettes. They say the bans ostracize people who want an alternative to tobacco products and will be especially hard on ex-smokers who are being lumped into the same smoking areas as tobacco users.

Their defenders also say they’re a good way to quit tobacco, even though science is murky on the claim.

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