

Health

No more menthol cigs

New ban on tobacco and nicotine vaping products

BOSTON, Nov 28, (Agencies): Massachusetts became the first state to ban flavored tobacco and nicotine vaping products, including menthol cigarettes, after Republican Gov Charlie Baker signed into law on Wednesday a bill that's meant to reduce the appeal of the products to young people amid a rash of illnesses and deaths linked to vaping.

Anti-smoking groups hailed the ban, which restricts sale and consumption of flavored vaping products immediately and does the same for menthol cigarettes starting June 1, 2020.

"The Massachusetts law is a major milestone in the fight to reverse the worsening e-cigarette epidemic and stop tobacco companies from targeting and addicting kids with flavored products," said Matthew Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

But the New England Convenience Store and Energy Marketers Association, which opposed the legislation, said it's exploring challenging the new law in court, or seeking other ways to change it.

"Public health and safety has been dealt a blow by anti-tobacco crusaders exploiting a youth vaping crisis, and by lawmakers bypassing prudent policy-making," the group said in a statement.

In recent months, Massachusetts and other states, including Michigan, Montana, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah and Washington, have temporarily banned or restricted the sale of vaping products. But Massachusetts is now the first with a broad, permanent ban in place on all flavored tobacco or nicotine vaping products, anti-smoking groups say.

Licensed

The new law specifically restricts sale of the products to licensed smoking bars such as cigar bars and hookah lounges, where they'll only be allowed to be consumed on-site. The restriction extends to menthol cigarettes and flavored e-cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco and chewing tobacco.

It also places a 75% excise tax on nicotine vaping products, gives public health officials new authority to regulate the products and requires health insurers cover tobacco cessation counseling.

Baker said he hopes other states adopt similar restrictions but argued that the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration are the only ones that can address the issue comprehensively for the nation.

"Sometimes someone has to go first," he said. "It's pretty clear there isn't going to be a federal policy on this anytime soon. So, in the absence of that, we had to act."

President Donald Trump has promised for months to approve a national ban on most flavored e-cigarettes. But in recent weeks his administration has walked back that promise, cancelling a planned announcement of a ban in favor of private meetings with the vaping industry and medical professionals.

Massachusetts' decision to extend the ban to menthols is unique. The mint flavor has typically been

exempt from such restrictions because it's long been one of the most popular flavors.

Menthols were omitted from legislation passed by the New York City Council on Tuesday after advocates, including the Rev Al Sharpton, argued their inclusion could lead to harsh police enforcement in the black community.

Studies have shown menthol cigarettes are consumed disproportionately by young people and minorities, and anti-tobacco groups and health experts have argued menthol has been marketed to African Americans.

But there have been recent signs that reluctance to address menthols is waning.

Boston health officials earlier this week prohibited the sale of menthols in convenience stores, and dozens of other communities in Massachusetts and California have taken steps to restrict menthols and other flavored cigarettes.

State Attorney General Maura Healey and other supporters said that restricting menthols and other flavored tobacco products is critical because they've contributed to growth in the traditional smoking market, which in turn prompted the creation of flavored vaping products targeted at youths.

The American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network said it hoped the new law sends a message to the industry.

Effects

"More than 80% of teens who have ever used a tobacco product started with a flavored product, and the tobacco industry knows this," the organization said in an emailed statement.

The legislation responds to growing concern about the health effects of vaping products, including deaths whose exact cause is still being investigated.

Massachusetts health officials say there have been more than 200 suspected cases of vaping-related lung injury and three confirmed deaths in the state.

In September, Baker declared a public health emergency and ordered a temporary ban on the sale of all vaping products - flavored and unflavored.

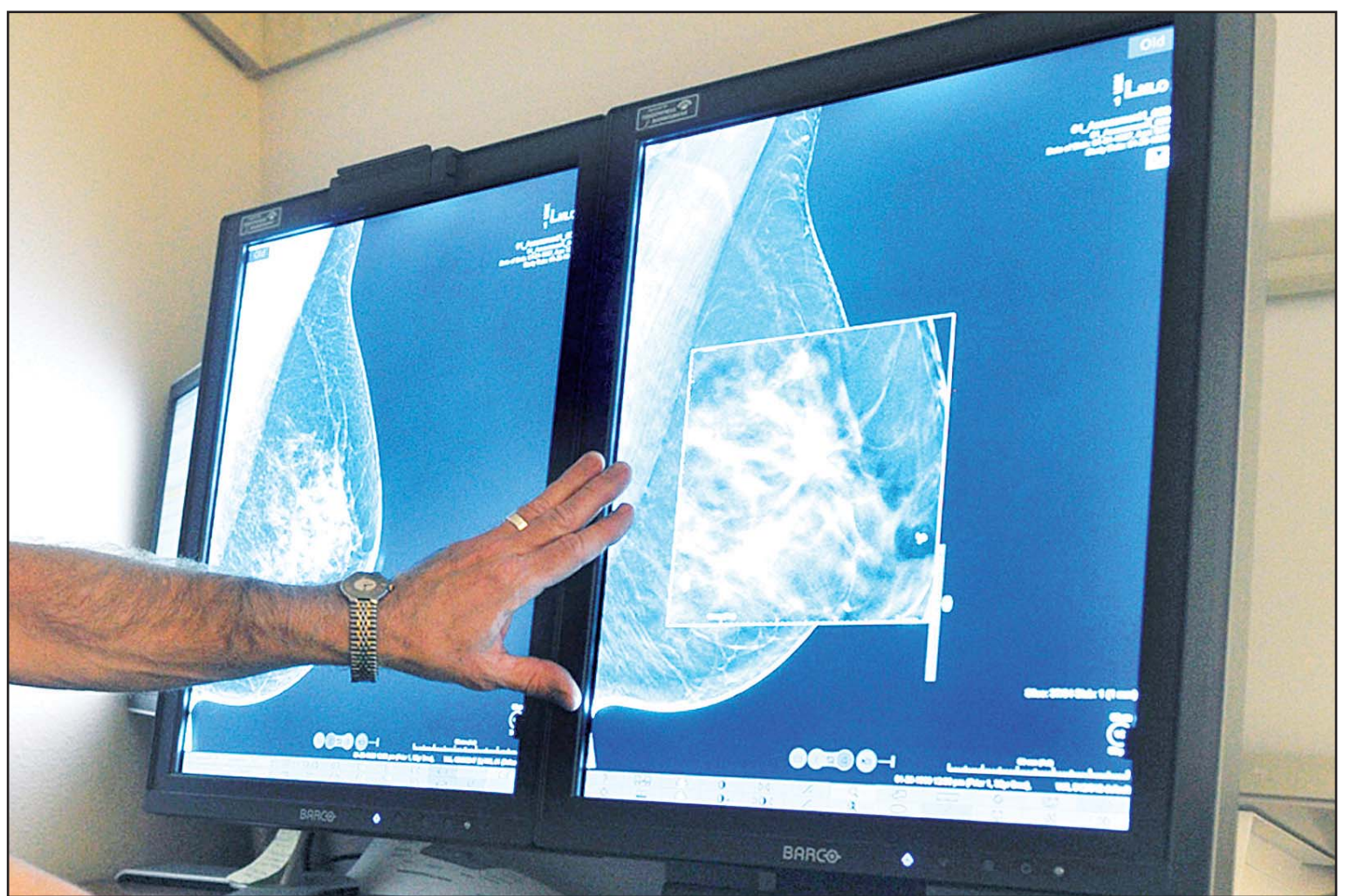
Also:

GOMA, Democratic Republic of Congo: Three health workers were killed and several injured in attacks against two Ebola response centres in eastern Congo early on Thursday, authorities and health services said.

Violence and unrest have severely hampered efforts to contain the second worst Ebola epidemic on record, which has killed 2,199 people since the outbreak was announced in August 2018.

A local militia known as Mai Mai has repeatedly attacked health facilities because they believe Ebola does not exist, and that the response is a plot to eliminate the local population.

The Mai Mai simultaneously attacked Ebola treatment centres in **Mangina in North Kivu** and **Byakoto in Ituri**, said **Jean-Jacques Muyembe**, head of the Ebola response for the Democratic Republic of Congo.



This July 31, 2012 file photo shows a mammogram, a test to detect cancer. (AP)

'Kidney went to wrong transplant patient'

MRIs of dense breasts find more cancer

Findings may offer clue in scientists' quest for a cure

Treat HIV-infected infants right away: study

NEW YORK, Nov 28, (AP): Giving women with very dense breasts an MRI scan in addition to a mammogram led to fewer missed cancers but also to a lot of false alarms and treatments that might not have been needed, a large study found.

The results give a clearer picture of the tradeoffs involved in such testing, but they can't answer the biggest question - whether it saves lives.

For women with dense breasts trying to decide on screening, "the dilemma remains," Dr Dan Longo of the New England Journal of Medicine wrote in an editorial published with the study on Wednesday.

About half of women over 40 have dense breasts and about 10% have very dense ones. That raises their risk of developing cancer and makes it harder to spot on mammograms if they do. US regulators are making rules to require that women get breast density information when they have mammograms, and many places provide it now. But what to do if you have dense breasts is unclear - it's not known if more or different types of screening such as MRIs or ultrasounds help.

The study involved more than 40,000 Dutch women ages 50 to 75 with very dense breasts who had normal results from a mammogram, a screening X-ray offered every two years in The Netherlands. About 8,000 of them also were offered an MRI scan, which uses powerful magnets to create detailed images, and 4,783 women agreed.

Missed

Researchers then tracked how many breast cancers were detected in each group within two years. Finding more of these "interval cancers" implies that the initial screening may have missed them.

The rate of these cancers after two years was twice as high in the group that was only offered mammograms. This suggests that adding MRIs to initial screening did catch more cancers, but they also gave a lot of false alarms - about 80 per 1,000 scans. Three quarters of women who had a biopsy after

WASHINGTON, Nov 28, (AP): When babies are born with HIV, starting treatment within hours to days is better than waiting even the few weeks to months that's the norm in many countries, researchers reported Wednesday.

The findings, from a small but unique study in Botswana, could influence care in Africa and other regions hit hard by the virus. They also might offer a clue in scientists' quest for a cure.

The Harvard-led team found super early treatment limits how HIV takes root in a newborn's body, shrinking the "reservoir" of virus that hides out, ready to rebound if those youngsters ever stop their medications.

"We don't think the current intervention is itself curative, but it sets the stage" for future attempts, said Dr Daniel Kuritzkes of Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital, who co-authored the study.

Giving pregnant women a cocktail of anti-HIV drugs can prevent them from spreading the virus to their unborn children, a step that has dramatically reduced the number of babies born with the

virus worldwide. Still, some 300 to 500 infants are estimated to be infected every day in sub-Saharan Africa.

Doctors have long known that treating babies in the first weeks to months of life is important, because their developing immune systems are especially vulnerable to HIV. But an infant dubbed the "Mississippi baby" raised a critical question: Should treatment start even earlier? The girl received a three-drug combination within 30 hours of her birth in July 2010, highly unusual for the time. Her family quit treatment when she was a toddler - yet her HIV remained in remission for a remarkable 27 months before she relapsed and restarted therapy.

The Botswana study was one of several funded by the US National Institutes of Health after doctors learned of the Mississippi baby, to further explore very early treatment.

The findings are encouraging, said Dr Deborah Persaud, a pediatric HIV specialist at Johns Hopkins University who wasn't involved with the Botswana study but helped evaluate the Mississippi baby.

"The study showed what we hypothesized happened in the Mississippi baby, that very early treatment really prevents establishment of these long-lived reservoir cells that currently are the barrier to HIV eradication," Persaud said.

She cautioned: "Very early treatment is important, but prevention should still be our top priority."

In Botswana, researchers tested at-risk newborns, enrolling 40 born with HIV, treating them within hours to a few days, and tracking them for two years. On Wednesday, they reported results from the first 10 patients, comparing them with 10 infants getting regular care - treatment beginning when they were a few months old.

Medication brought HIV under control in both groups. But the children treated earliest had a much smaller reservoir of HIV in their blood, starting about six months into treatment, the researchers reported in Science Translational Medicine.

The earliest-treated children also got another benefit: more normal functioning of some key parts of the immune system.

a questionable MRI turned out not to have cancer.

MRIs also led to more side effects during the scan or later testing, such as fainting or problems from an IV. And they cost much more than mammograms.

The study only looked at the first two years of screening with MRIs and it's too soon to say whether the test will save lives.

Without such evidence, it's tough to say what value there is in finding more cancers, especially many very small, early stage ones, Longo wrote. Doctors already know

that some of these will never cause symptoms or become life-threatening.

"Our dilemma is that, for most tumors, we cannot tell the difference between cancers that can kill you and those that cannot," he wrote.

Also:

CAMDEN, NJ: A New Jersey hospital says a kidney meant for one patient was mistakenly transplanted into another with the same name who was farther down the priority list.

Virtua Health says the Nov 18 operation on a 51-year-old patient at Virtua

Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Camden was successful.

But officials then discovered the patient was given the kidney out of priority order because "unusually, the individual who should have received the organ has the same name and is of similar age."

Virtua Health says the error was reported to state health officials and the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network.

The patient who should have received the kidney also underwent a successful transplant on Nov 24.

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