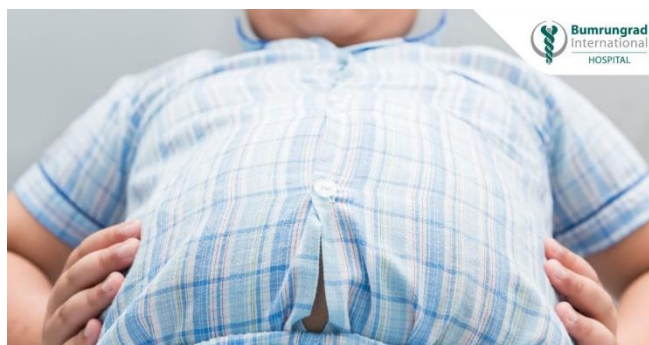


## Thai children face 3 key threats: vaping, obesity, online gambling



The National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) has flagged up three key risks endangering the lives and health of Thai youngsters. They are electronic cigarettes, obesity and online gambling.

A recent report shows that e-cigarettes or vaping devices have attracted more Thai youths, despite the associated health risks.

A study conducted by the Department of Health Service Support last year found that one in 10 Thai youngsters had developed the habit of smoking e-cigarettes. The report revealed that 92.2% of the surveyed youths succumbed to peer pressure, 3.2% were persuaded by relatives, and 1.6% by family members.

The NESDC said that despite awareness campaigns highlighting the dangers of e-cigarettes, youth are still being drawn by their attractive designs and packaging.

Many vaping devices – now in their fifth generation – have been designed to look like toys, based on popular cartoon characters, the agency said.

“This way, parents and guardians may be unaware that their children own electronic cigarettes,” it said.

### **Obesity**

Obesity has also been identified as another significant threat to Thai children’s health, with the NESDC pointing to the risk of chronic non-communicable diseases.

The Public Health Ministry’s nutritional status report from last year shows that 13.5% of Thai children aged six to 14 were overweight and even obese, compared to 16.9% of those aged 15-18.

This marks a surge of 13.3% and 12.9%, respectively, from a year earlier.

The Department of Health’s targeted ceiling for obesity in youngsters is 12%.

The Public Health Ministry’s report blamed inadequate physical activity for the rising obesity among Thai youths. The survey found that only 16% of youths aged five to 17 engaged in adequate physical activity.

Inadequate exercise can affect children’s health and lead to chronic communicable diseases, such as obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes, the ministry’s report said. It pointed to the need to promote good health among members of the public and reduce the risk of chronic non-communicable diseases in the long term.

### **Online gambling**

The NESDC also sounded the alarm on the growing popularity of online gambling among Thai youth.

A recent survey on Gen Z – those born between 1997 and 2012 – by Chulalongkorn University’s Centre for Gambling Studies showed that there are nearly 3 million online gamblers. Of them, 739,000 are new players – with an average of 61,583 joining per month or 2,052 per day.

A majority of the respondents (98.7%) said they gambled via their mobile phones, while 87.7 per cent said they were lured by online advertisements.

The survey found that 31.8% of the respondents engaged in online gambling for an hour daily on average, while as many as 51.6% gambled on weekends.

An estimated 58.6 billion baht is believed to change hands every year among young Thai online gamblers or an average of 1,633 baht per person. The monthly bets range from as low as 10 baht and as high as 91,260 baht.

Online gambling websites employ various marketing strategies to draw in new players, the study showed. These include advertisements that feature celebrities or famous influencers.

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