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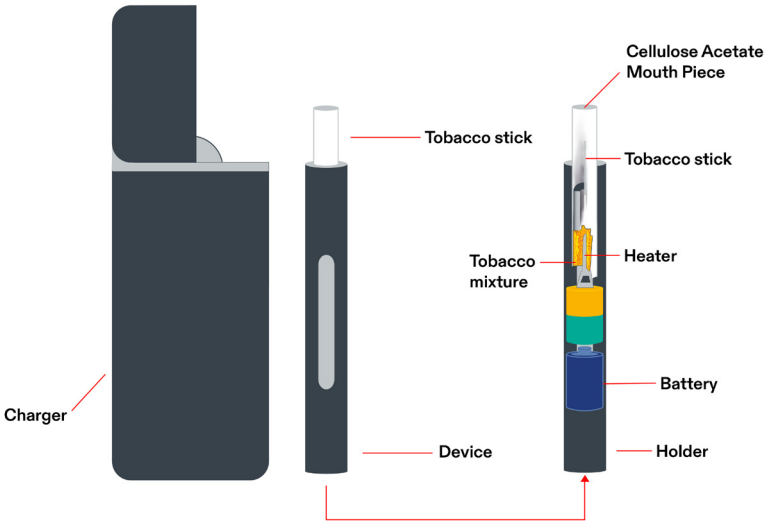
Swiss association for tobacco control

Heated Tobacco Products (HTP)

What are heated tobacco products?

Heated tobacco products (HTPs) first appeared on the Swiss market in 2015. Unlike e-cigarettes, which heat a liquid, HTPs are electronic devices that heat so-called tobacco sticks, made of processed tobacco, additives, and flavourings. Recent tobacco sticks are embedded with a metal blade, which is heated by an induction system.



Generally, HTPs consist of:

- a charger which holds and charges the device
- a battery-powered heating device
- and tobacco sticks heated by the device.

Why is the use of HTPs a cause for concern?

Their sleek design, aroma options and aggressive marketing by the tobacco industry have contributed to their uptake across the globe. In Switzerland, sales have seen a more than 125-fold increase, surging from just 13 million units in 2015 to nearly 1.6 billion in 2024.

Despite this growth, HTPs are still not regulated like conventional cigarettes, particularly in terms of taxation. Even more concerning, dual use (smoking cigarettes alongside HTPs) is the predominant pattern among HTP adopters leaving total tobacco consumption unchanged.

In a nutshell

HTPs heat processed tobacco to generate an inhalable aerosol, which delivers nicotine and other detrimental substances.

HTPs are harmful to your health and the environment.

HTPs should be subjected to the same regulatory measures as conventional cigarettes.

What are the health risks of HTPs?

HTPs, though marketed as lower-risk alternatives, still deliver addictive nicotine and expose users, and those nearby, to harmful substances.

Sometimes the levels of harmful substances from HTPs are comparable to or higher than those found in cigarette smoke.

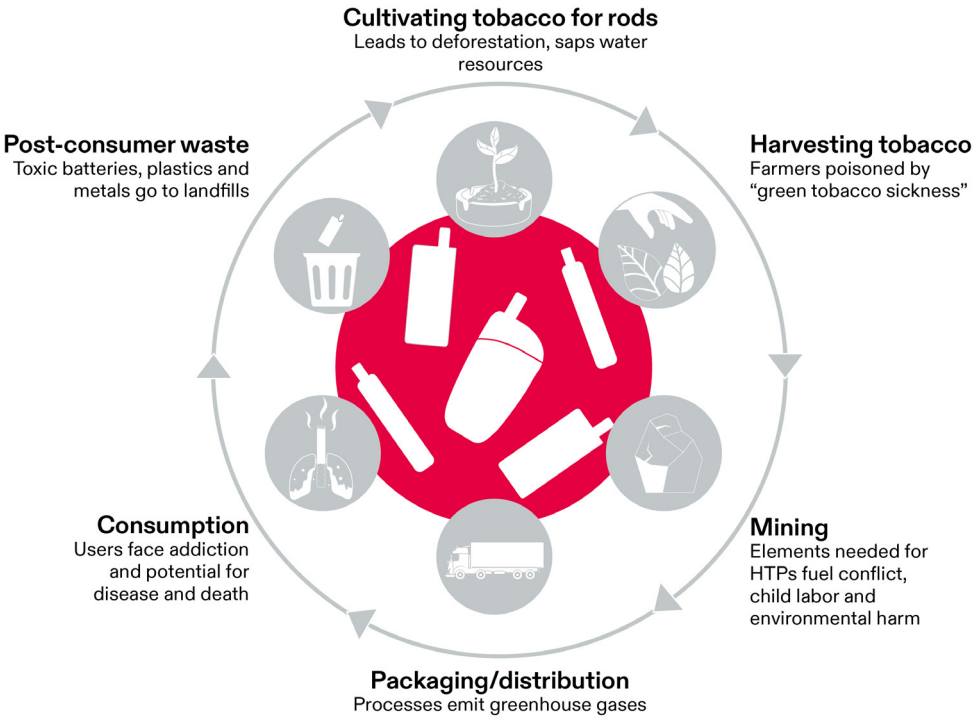
The World Health Organisation (WHO) stresses that no tobacco product is safe, especially for youth, elderly, and pregnant women. Independent research has identified toxicants and carcinogens, such as formaldehyde, benzopyrene, acetaldehyde, and glycidol, in HTP emissions. Moreover, the levels of harmful substances from HTPs can be comparable to or higher than those found in cigarette smoke.

Thus, despite industry claims of less harm, no independent studies support a meaningful reduction in risk. HTPs may even hinder smoking cessation by maintaining addiction
or triggering relapse. From a public health standpoint, strong, evidence-based regulation is essential.

What is the environmental impact of HTPs

HTPs generate significant environmental harm. Used sticks contain non-biodegradable plastic and release harmful substances, such as nicotine, heavy metals, and PFAS, into soil and waterways. These “forever chemicals” persist in ecosystems and pose long-term environmental and health risks. Device production depends on raw materials like lithium and cobalt, often extracted under conditions that contribute to deforestation, pollution, and human rights violations. The devices also create electronic waste, with batteries and sharp metal components that are difficult to recycle and pose safety hazards. Despite industry claims of reduced environmental impact, HTPs carry a substantial ecological footprint.

How are HTPs regulated in Switzerland?

Since October 2024, HTPs are regulated under the Tobacco Products Act (TaPG), the Tobacco Tax Act, and the Passive Smoking Protection Act. The law prohibits sales to individuals under 18, extends passive smoking protections to include HTPs, and mandates text-only health warnings, unlike cigarettes, which require pictorial warnings. As of January 2025, HTPs are taxed at 16%, a rate significantly lower than the 51% applied to cigarettes. This tax advantage makes HTPs more appealing and profitable to the tobacco industry, even though the health risks may be comparable. Further tax increases are under discussion, including proposals linked to AHV funding. Overall, regulation remains limited. To effectively protect public health, HTPs must be regulated on par with cigarettes in all areas, including taxation, marketing, product design, and warning labels.

The Harmful Life Cycle of HTPs