

GUIDANCE AND KEY FACTS ABOUT VAPING AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

1. INTRODUCTION

National and local intelligence indicates that the use of vapes amongst young people has increased significantly in the last two years. Although research suggests that use among young people is largely experimental and remains lower in young people who have never smoked, increases in levels of vaping are of concern.

The key message about vaping is that it is not for children. Whilst it can help adults to quit smoking, it isn't risk-free, so those who don't smoke should not vape.

There are now proposals to introduce restrictions on how vapes are packaged and displayed so they are not attractive to children and young people, and disposable vapes are going to be banned. However, they are still a useful aid for adults to stop smoking. This guidance has been produced to summarise some key facts about vaping, and to sign post professionals working with children to useful information, guidance and useful resources.

2. KEY FACTS

- Smoking tobacco will kill up to 2 out of 3 long term users. Tobacco remains the single biggest cause of preventable illness and death with approximately 4300 people in the North East dying each year from smoking related diseases.
- Tobacco contains thousands of harmful chemicals; nicotine itself is not very harmful and has been used safely for many years in medicines to help people stop smoking.
- Nicotine-containing vapes are an effective quitting aid and can help adults to stop smoking
- Vaping is much less harmful than smoking, but it does expose users to some toxins that are released into the lungs. The period while the lungs are growing for young people is important.
- Nicotine is addictive, so nicotine-containing vapes should not be used by non-smokers and young people.
- The risks of the long term use of vapes is not yet fully understood.
- Evidence suggests that the majority of young people have never tried vaping, and those who have, have usually also tried smoking too. A recent national survey found that the proportion of young people experimenting with vaping had grown by 50% year on year, however the majority had only tried it once or twice and the majority of those that had never smoked had not tried vaping.
- In Sunderland's Health Related Behaviour Survey in 2023 there was a significant increase in secondary school pupils who had at least tried vapes compared to the previous survey – 35% compared to 21% in 2021. However, 61% of those completing the survey had never used one.
- The likelihood of trying vapes increases with age and if the young person already smokes.
- There is no strong evidence that vaping is a gateway to smoking.
- Vapes are regulated in the UK – it is illegal to sell nicotine-containing vaping products to anyone under 18 or for adults to buy them for those under 18 years old.

- Sunderland Trading Standards gather information about the selling of vapes to under 18 year olds. They also monitor the sale of illegal vapes.
- Actions can be taken against any trader selling vapes to underage customers or selling illegal products, including seizing products, written warnings to retailers and formal criminal investigations.
- Vapes contain batteries and electronic wastes and should be taken to recycling centres, but often they are thrown away or littered and end up in landfill; incorrect disposal can potentially release hazardous chemical waste into the environment.
- The Smoking and Vape Bill is currently going through Parliament, which includes proposals to restrict vape flavours, how they are packaged and how they are displayed. Separate legislation is being used to ban the supply of disposable vapes.

3. WHAT TO TELL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT VAPING

The key message is that vapes are not for children and young people. We don't know the long-term effects of vaping on our health yet – so they shouldn't use them.

Schools and colleges can use [these resources](#) that have been developed by Action for Smoking and Health (ASH) and Sheffield City Council, which have been adapted for the North East. This includes posters, a classroom presentation and short animation, a teacher's toolkit and an electronic leaflet for parents; these give the facts and can be used to develop discussions with young people around vapes, as well as smoking.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has produced a new resource pack for schools on vaping, aimed at Years 7 and 8 on the [Better Health School Zone](#). The pack includes three bitesize sessions, including PowerPoints and films made with young people covering social pressures around vaping, its impact, and the effects of nicotine. The resources are linked to National Curriculum requirements and guidance on delivering PSHE.

New for 2024/25: The Specialist Stop Smoking Service have developed a programme for schools and youth services to help inform young people of the key facts about vaping. This includes raising awareness of the potential risks of vaping, including the negative effects of nicotine addiction, as well as exploring risk taking behaviour and presenting the facts and dispelling the fiction. If you would like further information about these sessions and what the Service can support your school with, please contact the Service on 0191 567 4644.

4. SCHOOL POLICY ON VAPING

Schools and colleges may want to develop a policy regarding the use of vapes. This should be in line with any school policies in relation to products that are illegal to sell to 18 year olds, such as cigarettes or alcohol.

It is important to be aware that a young person has not broken the law by purchasing a vape or having them in their possession, it is those selling the product that have broken the law, so any consequences/punishment should be proportionate.

A child/young person should be asked where they got the product from. This can enable a report of an underage sale to be made (see below), and it could also indicate a safeguarding concern if the vape was gifted to the child or young person by an adult. Use the following link to report a safeguarding concern: [Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership - Reporting Concerns \(safeguardingchildrensunderland.com\)](https://safeguardingchildrensunderland.com)

Some ideas of what to include in a school policy can be found [here](#). If you need additional support on what you should include within your school policy please contact Ryan Houghton, Public Health Practitioner, at ryan.houghton@sunderland.gov.uk

For advice about stop smoking services, please contact your School Nurse on 03000 031 552.

5. HOW TO REPORT UNDERAGE SALES AND OTHER BREACHES

Under-age sales

Nicotine containing vapes are age restricted and regulated by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). It is illegal to sell nicotine vaping products to anyone under 18 or for adults to buy them for those under 18 years old.

Illegal vapes

To be legally sold in the UK, nicotine containing vapes must also:

- Contain 20 mg/ml or less of nicotine (equivalent to 2% or less)
- Carry the health warning 'This product contains nicotine which is a highly addictive substance.'
- Be notified to the MHRA and listed on its [website](#).

Actions can be taken by Trading Standards against any trader selling vapes to underage customers or selling illegal products.

If you have any information about where a child has bought a vape from or you are concerned about illegal vapes being sold, you can report it here: [Illegal vapes/e-cigarettes - Sunderland City Council](#)

6. FURTHER INFORMATION/GUIDANCE

Further guidance for professionals working with children and young people, as well as some websites young people can use are listed below:

- NHS Better Health advice on young people and vaping: [Vaping to quit smoking - Better Health - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- The North East Directors of Public Health [Vaping factsheet for professionals working with young people](#)
- ASH Survey ASH Survey on youth vaping 2023 [Use of e-cigarettes among young people in Great Britain - ASH](#)
- ASH guidance for schools <https://ash.org.uk/uploads/ASH-guidance-for-school-vaping-policies.pdf>
- NICE guideline NG209 [recommends a whole school approach to smoking and vaping](#).
- The PSHE Association provides resources to support teaching on smoking and vaping (note: these are included within 'Drug and alcohol education').<https://pshe-association.org.uk/drugeducation>
- [FRANK website: information for young people about vaping](#)
- healthforteens.co.uk