

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 recent 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 resources.

2. KEY FACTS ABOUT VAPING

- 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 and can be a distraction for young people in school. It is more risky for young people than for adults, as evidence suggests the developing brain is more sensitive to its addictive effects.
- 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 collected by YouGov found that the rate of vaping had stabilised in 2024, following a period of increase previously whereby the proportion of young people experimenting with vaping had grown by 50% year on year.
- 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.
- Vapes contain batteries and electronic wastes and should be taken to recycling centres to be disposed of, 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 to make them less attractive to young people. Separate legislation is being used to ban the supply of disposable vapes from June 2025.

3. SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS AND USEFUL RESOURCES

Sunderland Specialist Stop Smoking Service can support schools and youth services to help inform young people of the key facts about vaping. This includes providing advice, support and resources regarding the potential risks of vaping for young people, including the negative effects of nicotine addiction, as well as providing the key facts about vaping and dispelling the myths. More information can be found on their [dedicated webpage](#) or by calling them on 0191 567 4644.

Police resources on a number of topics including vaping are available for schools via the [Pol-Ed website](#). The aim of the resources are to help keep children safe through a range of age-appropriate interventions. For further information, you can contact Northumbria Police School Liaison Team via their mailbox at school.liaison@northumbria.police.uk

Sunderland Youth, Drug & Alcohol Project (YDAP) can offer advice and support to young people and their families on vapes and similar devices that contain other substances such as cannabis or Spice; see their website [here](#) for more information.

A regional resource package [can be found here](#), including posters, a classroom presentation and short animation, a teacher's toolkit and an electronic leaflet for parents; these give the facts about vaping and can be used to develop discussions with young people around vapes, as well as smoking.

National resources on vaping developed by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), aimed at Years 7 and 8 can be found at the [Better Health School Zone](#). The package 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. NHS Scotland and the Northern Ireland Public Health Agency also have some useful resources here: [Vaping addiction soon takes hold | NHS inform](#) and here: [Vaping addiction can soon take hold | HSC Public Health Agency](#)

4. SCHOOL POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Schools and colleges may want to develop a policy regarding the use of vapes. Some ideas of what to include in a school policy can be found [here](#). Some points to consider when establishing school procedures include:

- Vaping is far less harmful than smoking, so responses to finding young people with vapes should be proportionate
- A young person has not broken the law by purchasing a vape or having them in their possession, it is those selling them the product that have broken the law

- It is important to ask where the young person got the vape from; as the product is age restricted, they may be vulnerable to being given illegal vapes or at risk of exploitation
- The gifting of vapes to a child or young person could be an indicator of exploitation; any concerns should be recorded and a safeguarding concern can be raised here: [Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership - Reporting Concerns \(safeguardingchildrensunderland.com\)](https://safeguardingchildrensunderland.com)
- The school can submit a report of a suspected underage sale to Trading Standards (see section below); the more information Trading Standards receive, the more evidence they have to be able to act
- It is important to find out why a young person is using a vape; there may be a number of reasons, including peer pressure, just trying them, or they could be addicted to the nicotine. If there is any indication of addiction, the school should refer them to their School Nurse or to Sunderland Stop Smoking Service. Your School Nurse can be contacted on 03000 031 552 and the stop smoking service number is 0191 567 4644. There are screening tools available for nicotine dependency; please ask if you would like to see them.

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

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 including seizing products, written warnings and formal criminal investigations. From June 2025 disposable, single-use vapes will be illegal to sell in the UK.

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 \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://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 2024 [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