

FAQ's

February 2023

Vape use in Children & Young People

What is vaping? Are vapes and e-cigarettes the same thing?

E-cigarettes, also known as vapes, are a popular stop smoking aid in the UK. They are far less harmful than cigarettes and can help people to quit smoking. It is a device that allows you to inhale nicotine in vapour rather than smoke – therefore they do not burn tobacco and do not produce tar or carbon monoxide (two of the most damaging elements in tobacco smoke). More info on vaping to quit smoking [here](#). They are not recommended for non-smokers and young people because it is not completely harmless.

What are the risks to young people?

Vaping is not for children. They are designed to help people to quit smoking. If you don't smoke – don't vape.

It is illegal to sell cigarettes or vapes to under-18s, or for adults to buy them on behalf of under 18s.

Possible effects of vaping:

- Addiction to nicotine
- Dizziness, headaches, nausea
- Difficulty concentrating
- Negative mood and behavioural changes
- Coughing, dry mouth and throat
- Shortness of breath

Nicotine is an addictive substance that can be hard to stop using.

Evidence suggests the brain in adolescence is more sensitive to the effects of nicotine compared to adults, as the brain is still developing.

Some disposable vapes on sale are illegal and do not meet safety or quality regulations in the UK.

[Data](#) show the use of vapes in children and young people has increased over the past few years.

What to respond to young people if they say “at least it's not smoking/alcohol/drugs” etc.?

Vaping is not risk-free, particularly for people who have never smoked. More evidence is needed on the long-term use of vapes. Young people can be informed about the possible effects listed above.

Can I anonymously report information about where vapes are being illegally sold to under 18s?

Yes. You can anonymously report via South West Trading Standards: [Report it \(swillegaltobacco.info\)](http://swillegaltobacco.info)

Are some vapes a fire hazard?

When licenced vapes are used properly, no. However, batteries can present a fire risk when over-charged, short-circuited, submerged in water or if they are damaged. It is extremely important to charge them safely too.

Unlicensed vapes are more likely to be hazardous as they are not regulated and therefore don't undergo the safety checks.

What support can be provided to someone who is addicted to vapes and wants to stop using them?

Once you have been vaping for a while and feel sure you will not go back to smoking, you can aim to quit vaping too. Many vapers find they get to this stage after about 12 months. There are a couple of ways to try to quit vaping:

- reduce your frequency of vaping over time
- gradually reduce the strength of nicotine in your e-liquid

Do not rush this step. Only reduce your vaping frequency or nicotine strength when you feel you will not go back to smoking and do not have to puff more to compensate.

What if a young person is using a vape to stop smoking? Can this be supported or are there other options?

[Nicotine Replacement Therapy \(NRT\)](#), for example, Nicotine patches, is licensed for ages 12+.

What is the environmental impact of disposable vapes?

The disposable smoking devices have been linked to issues including litter, plastic waste and fire risk.

- Although most plastics **never** decompose, they do eventually break down into smaller and smaller pieces called microplastics.
- For anything to decompose fully it needs to be eaten by micro-organisms. Most micro-organisms do not like plastic, and for those that do, there is simply too much plastic for them to eat.

How do I dispose of a disposable vape?

Correct disposal of e-cigarettes and vapes:

- E-cigarettes or vapes should not be thrown away in general waste in order to avoid the risk of fire.
- E-cigarettes or vapes should be disposed of at small waste electrical and electronic equipment receptacles widely available at household waste recycling centres.
- If the batteries inside vapes are easily removable, these should be removed and disposed of in battery recycling receptacles.

Will it get me into trouble?

In the UK, it is illegal to sell vaping products to under 18s, or for adults to buy the products for them. Enforcement officers (often the police) will use their discretion to decide whether to issue a warning, a fixed penalty notice, or to refer an offence to a court. Retailers can receive large fines, lose licences, or even be forced to close.

How old do you have to be to buy a vape?

In the UK, 18 years old.

Are vapes addictive?

Yes, if the vape contains nicotine. Nicotine is highly addictive. Most smokers use tobacco regularly because they are addicted to nicotine. The same can happen with vapes containing nicotine. The main reason that people smoke is because they are addicted to nicotine. Inhaling any drug gets it to the brain very quickly. It takes just 8 to 10 seconds for the nicotine to reach the brain after inhaled. Smokers can get hooked very quickly and it can take years and a huge effort to kick the habit. Many people who smoke wish they hadn't started in the first place.

Can you get them without nicotine in them?

Yes, you can get nicotine-free vapes (e.g. 0% or 0mg nicotine). However, it is recommended that non-smokers and non-vapers do not start vaping.

Is there somewhere I can signpost young people to if they want to learn more?

Young people can find out more on the [Talk to Frank](#) website.

Can you use Vapes in the car?

It is illegal to smoke in a car (or other vehicle) with anyone under 18. The law changed on 1 October 2015, to protect children and young people from the dangers of second hand smoke. However, the law does not apply to e-cigarettes (vaping).

Do they set off fire alarms or blow up?

Concerns have been raised about [e-cigarettes overheating or exploding, and the associated risk of burns](#), and poorly-made or counterfeit chargers for e-cigarettes have caused house fires.

To reduce the risk of fire, only buy e-cigarettes from reputable outlets, use the correct charger for the device, follow the manufacturer's instructions and don't leave an e-cigarette charging unattended or overnight. As with other electrical devices like mobile phones and laptops, e-cigarettes should not be charged or used if they've been damaged – battery cells that are damaged pose a chemical and fire risk.

Are they safer than tobacco?

Public Health England conducted an independent review of vapourisers in 2019 and found that, based on the available evidence, vaping is around 95% less harmful than smoking. The Royal College of Physicians report came to a similar conclusion in 2016.

Where can I find additional resources for local authorities, schools and parents on young people vaping?

Here you can find extra resources such as posters, electronic leaflets, an animated video and a classroom presentation: [ASH resources on youth vaping - ASH](#)

Further information, support and references:

[Action on Smoking and Health: Use of e-cigarettes \(vapes\) among young people in Great Britain](#)

Data on the increasing use of e-cigarettes in Britain, from a survey of 11-18 year olds 2013-2022.

[ASH resources for local authorities, schools and parents on youth vaping - ASH](#)

Info and resources for local authorities, schools and parents.

[Office for Health Improvement and Disparities: Nicotine vaping in England: 2022 evidence update](#)

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence ([NICE](#)) [guideline NG209](#) covers schools based interventions in its recommendations on preventing uptake.

[Vapes | FRANK \(talktofrank.com\)](#)

[Batteries and chargers - Fire safety at home | London Fire Brigade \(london-fire.gov.uk\)](#)

[Environmental impact of single-use vapes - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

[Future of the sea: plastic pollution - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Tobacco | Effects of Tobacco | FRANK \(talktofrank.com\)](#)

[Quit Smoking Aids | One You South Gloucestershire \(southglos.gov.uk\)](#)

[Smoking in vehicles - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[Vaping - RoSPA](#)