

YOUNG PEOPLE AND VAPING

Information for parents,
carers and staff who work
with young people

February 2026

KEY MESSAGES

- * If you don't smoke, don't vape.
- * Vapes are not meant for use by young people. They can be used to help adults who smoke to quit smoking.
- * Vaping is not risk-free, particularly for young people and those who have never smoked. Vaping can lead to both short and medium term health impacts.
- * Using nicotine from a young age can harm young people's brain development. This can affect the parts of the brain that impact concentration, learning ability, mood, and self control.
- * Nicotine is a stimulant drug which is highly addictive. Using nicotine during teenage years may lead to a dependency of nicotine and other substances.
- * Young people say that peer groups and peer pressure/influence are the main reasons for choosing to vape.
- * Vape waste is extremely harmful to our environment. Most vapes contain lithium-ion batteries which often end up being thrown out in normal waste bins, causing a fire hazard.

What is a vape?


Vapes, also known as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), are devices which heat a liquid (called an e-liquid) to produce a vapour that is then inhaled by the user. Most contain nicotine and flavouring chemicals (1). It is illegal to sell a vape or purchase a vape for a person under 18 (2).




Are vapes addictive?


Most vapes contain nicotine, a stimulant drug, which is highly addictive (1). Early exposure to nicotine can impact on parts of the brain that control concentration, learning ability, mood, and impulse control (2,3). Using nicotine in childhood and teenage years can increase young people's risk of harm from other substances, such as cannabis and cocaine (4).


How does vaping impact on health?


 Short-term effects of coughing, dizziness, sore throats and headaches have been recognised. The long-term effects are not yet known (4).

 Recent studies suggest that vaping may negatively impact heart health, including heart rate and blood pressure (4).

 Nicotine affects brain development (which occurs until about age 25). This can make it harder to learn and concentrate (3).

 When a person is dependent on (or addicted to) nicotine (including that found in a vape) and stops using it, their body and brain have to get used to not having nicotine. This can result in temporary symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, including irritability, restlessness, feeling anxious, trouble sleeping, problems concentrating, and craving nicotine. People may keep using a vape to help relieve these symptoms (2).

 Young people may turn to vaping to try to deal with stress or anxiety, creating a cycle of nicotine dependence. But nicotine addiction can be a source of stress in itself (3).

 Vaping may affect sporting performance. This can lead to lung inflammation and irritation, which can make it harder to breathe and do well in sports (5).



New evidence suggests vaping has negative impacts on oral health (mouth, teeth and gum health), but more longer term studies are required (6).



Many of the ingredients in a vape (e-liquid) are considered safe for ingestion (eating), but when these ingredients are heated they produce new chemicals that may not be safe to inhale (7). The flavours in the e-liquid could potentially lead to allergic reactions from use of these vaping products (8).

Why are young people vaping?



One of the main identifiable reasons that young people choose to vape is down to peer groups and peer pressure/influence (9,10).



Vapes are very attractive to young people due to their appearance. They are available in many different colours and flavours, and can be cheap to buy (4).



Many vaping brands are using shiny branding and flavours to attract young people. The increasing presence of the tobacco industry in the market is a concern (11).

Are vapes harmful to the environment?

Vape waste is extremely harmful to our environment as it consists of three different forms of environmentally harmful waste:



Plastic - this is often non-biodegradable and difficult to recycle



Electronic - including batteries which can be a fire risk and circuit boards which can leak hazardous chemicals into the environment



Chemical - e-liquid is a hazardous chemical waste and can be dangerous to children and animals if consumed (12).

Most vapes contain lithium-ion batteries which often end up being discarded in normal waste bins, causing a fire hazard. Vapes are difficult to recycle which means that only a small number of vapes are properly disposed of or recycled. Around 67 million vapes are thrown away in the UK every year (13).

Is there advice available?

Yes, [Quit Your Way Youth - NHSGGC](#) has a [stop vaping tips for young people leaflet](#) which provides practical tips for stopping vaping. Advice is also available for young people by contacting the organisations below:



[Quit Your Way Scotland](#) can offer advice and support to anyone of any age who would like to quit vaping via the phone or webchat service.



[Childline](#) provides tips for quitting vaping as well as support via Childline counsellor or on their message boards.



[Breathing Space](#) can provide information and support for anyone in Scotland over the age of 16 experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety.



[Parentclub](#) offer advice on what to do if you think your child may be vaping and tips for starting a conversation about vaping.



To protect young people, we advise staff who work with young people to:

- Approach vapes like any other age restricted product.
- Discourage experimentation of vaping.
- Take opportunities to provide accurate and clear information on the risks of vaping to our health. This includes that vaping impacts on our health in the short and medium term, and some long-term impacts remain unclear.
- Take opportunities to provide accurate and clear information on the dangers of nicotine and how it is a highly addictive substance that can affect young people's brain development.
- Encourage young people not to share vapes with their friend(s) as this can increase their risk of spreading germs or infections.
- Encourage safe choices and minimise peer pressure/influence.

About us

This Information Guide has been written by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde 'Young People and Vaping Group'. For more information, please contact ggc.quityourway.schools@nhs.scot

Disclaimer: All references are correct at time of publication and will be reviewed every six months. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is not responsible for the content of any external websites listed. 4

References

1. <https://www.stor.scot.nhs.uk/handle/11289/580365>
2. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/vaping/>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth.html?>
4. <https://ashscotland.org.uk/get-support/working-with-young-people/young-people-vaping/>
5. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32282460/>
6. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8293737/>
7. <https://www.lung.ca/lung-health/vaping-what-you-need-know>
8. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0273230017300892>
9. <https://ash.org.uk/resources/view/use-of-e-cigarettes-among-young-people-in-great-britain>
10. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7995953/>
11. <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/tobacco-industry-marketing/4-marketing-tactics-e-cigarette-companies-use-target>
12. <https://www.undo.org/environmental-impact/vape-waste-is-toxic-waste>
13. <https://nationalrecycling.co.uk/vape-waste-statistics-2025/>