



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 to be used 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, affecting the parts of the brain that influence concentration levels, learning ability, mood, and self control.
- * Nicotine is a stimulant drug which is highly addictive. Using nicotine during teenage years may lead to subsequent 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 discarded in normal waste bins, posing a fire hazard.

What is a vape?

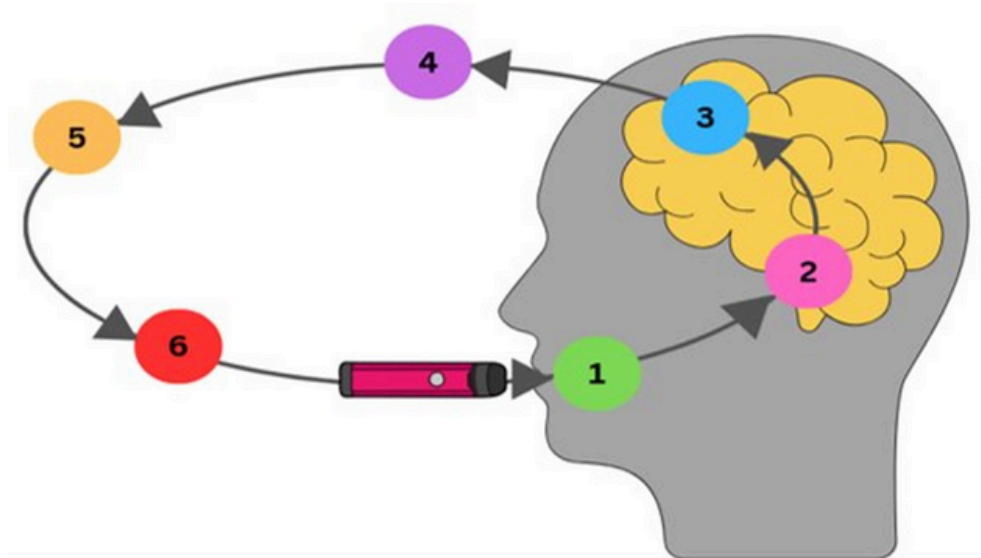
Vapes are devices which heat a liquid (called an e-liquid) to produce a vapour that is then inhaled by the user. Vapes can also be referred to as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) or Nicotine Vapour Products (NVPs). Most contain nicotine and flavouring chemicals (1).



Despite vapes often being considered as a single type of product, there is a wide variety of vaping products available (1). Vapes may help adults who smoke to quit smoking (2).



Are vapes addictive?



- 1 Nicotine, a stimulant drug, is delivered through a vape.
- 2 Nicotine travels to the brain.
- 3 Nicotine activates receptors stimulating the release of dopamine.
- 4 This creates feelings of calmness and reward.
- 5 Dopamine levels drop, triggering withdrawal symptoms of stress and anxiety.
- 6 These feelings create the urge for another hit (3).



Early exposure to nicotine can impact parts of the brain that control concentration levels, learning ability, mood, and impulse control (4,5).



Using nicotine in adolescence can increase young people's risk of harm from other substances such as cannabis and cocaine (6). Some vapes have been marketed as 'nicotine free' but testing has confirmed they do in fact contain nicotine.

How does vaping impact on health?



Short-term effects of coughing, dizziness, sore throats and headaches have been identified. The long-term effects are not yet known (6).



Recent studies suggest that vaping may negatively impact heart health, including heart rate and blood pressure (6).



Nicotine can harm the developing adolescent brain. The brain keeps developing until about age 25 (7).



As nicotine affects brain development, this can make it harder to learn and concentrate (5). Some of the brain changes are permanent and can affect mood and ability to control impulses into adulthood (8).



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 (9).



Emerging evidence suggests vaping has negative impacts on oral health, but more longer term studies are required (10).



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 (11). The flavours in the e-liquid could potentially lead to allergic reactions from use of these vaping products (12).

Can vaping impact on mental health?



When a person is dependent on (or addicted to) nicotine 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 (4).



Nicotine withdrawal symptoms include irritability, restlessness, feeling anxious or depressed, trouble sleeping, problems concentrating, and craving nicotine. People may keep using a vape to help relieve these symptoms (4).



Young people may turn to vaping to try to deal with stress or anxiety, creating a cycle of nicotine dependence. But nicotine dependency can be a source of stress in itself (5).

Are many young people vaping?



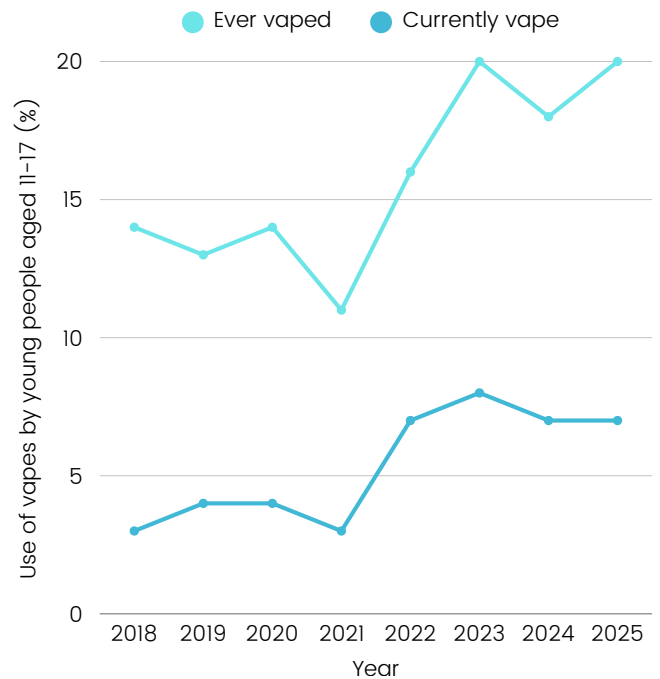
Between 2018 and 2022, there was a steep increase in vape use amongst young people (1). This increase coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and a huge increase in the use of disposable vapes.



In 2025, most 11-17 year olds in Great Britain had never tried vapes (79%) (13).



In 2025, 7.3% of young people in Great Britain said they currently vape, of whom 4.8% vape regularly (more than once a week) (13).



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 (13, 14).

When we asked young people in Greater Glasgow and Clyde why they vaped, some of their responses were:

“It was a trend and I felt pressured into it”

“I wanted to be cool and felt if I said no it would be embarrassing”

“They’re cool, everyone is doing it right now”



There is emerging evidence that young people who are exposed to cigarette smoke in their own or someone else’s house are significantly more likely to vape regularly (at least once per week). This may be due to young people viewing nicotine use as normal and socially acceptable (15).



Vapes are very attractive to young people due to their appearance. They are available in many different colours and flavours, and some look like toys (6).

Many vaping brands are using slick branding and flavours to target young people, and the increasing presence of the tobacco industry in the market is a concern (16).



Credit: ASH Scotland

Unlike cigarettes which are required to in plain packaging and not on display in shops, vapes are very eye catching and clearly visible in shops (17). Vapes are often marketed on popular social media platforms used by young people and there are concerns that ‘influencers’ are being paid to promote vaping on these sites (6).

What is the law in Scotland regarding vaping and young people?



It is illegal to sell a vape or purchase a vape for a person under 18 (4).



A ban on the sale and supply of single-use vapes in Scotland began on 1st June 2025 (18).

1/3

Many vapes sold online and in some shops have been found to be non-compliant and therefore not intended for the UK market. Trading Standards estimate that a third of vapes sold are non-compliant and therefore illegal (19).



These include vapes with oversized tanks or unsafe levels of nicotine or other substances (including drugs such as cannabis). As these vapes do not comply with the UK regulations, it is not possible to know exactly what is in these vapes, the quantity of these contents and the possible health risks (20).



Nicotine and low dose cannabidiol (CBD) are legal to use in the UK. SPICE (Synthetic Cannabis) and THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol, the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis) are illegal in the UK. SPICE and THC are the most common illegal substances used in vapes (21).

If you find out that a business is selling vapes to under 18s or is selling non-compliant vapes, you can report the business to Trading Standards. Visit the [Consumer Advice](#) website.



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 often does not degrade and is 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 (22).



Most vapes contain lithium-ion batteries, which often end up being discarded in normal waste bins, posing 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 (23).

To find out more about where to dispose of vapes, visit [recycle your electricals](#).



Are young people still smoking cigarettes?



In 2025, 2.6% of young people in Great Britain said they currently smoke. This has slightly increased over the last two years (1.6% in 2023, 2.3% in 2024). The number of young people in Great Britain who have ever tried smoking has significantly increased in the last two years (14% in 2023, 18% in 2024, 21% in 2025) (13). There is emerging evidence that vapes may create a new route into smoking for young people (1,6).



Occasionally, people may decide to use a vape alongside smoking tobacco (dual use). Dual use does not appear to provide any health benefits and may increase the risk of some diseases (24).

Are there other nicotine products young people are using?

There are some other nicotine products that young people might be experimenting with. Here are some examples:



Nicotine pouches (white snus) contain flavoured nicotine but not tobacco. They are placed between the lip and gum, and come in various nicotine strengths and flavours (25). As these do not contain tobacco, they can be sold legally and marketed to children.



Snus is loose tobacco or tobacco in a pouch, which is inserted to sit under the lip to give a nicotine dose. Snus is illegal in the EU except in Sweden (26).



Shisha (hookah, water pipe, hubble bubble) is becoming increasingly popular in the UK. Tobacco is mixed with fruit or molasses sugar through a bowl and hose/pipe, and burned with wood, coal or charcoal, creating flavoured smoke to inhale. A shisha session (usually between 20-80minutes) can be the equivalent of consuming over 100 cigarettes (27).



Cigar use is appearing to increase amongst young people, particularly in those aged 18-24 (28).



Chewys are a flavoured gummy containing nicotine. As these do not contain tobacco, they can be sold legally and marketed to children.

All of these products contain nicotine, which is an addictive substance, not recommended for use by young people.

Is there advice available for young people who vape?

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 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 access to a Childline counsellor and the message boards.
- [Breathing Space](#) can provide information and support for anyone in Scotland over the age of 16 experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety.



What advice is available for parents, carers and others concerned about a young person vaping?

To protect young people, we advise parents, carers and those who work with young people to:

- Approach vapes like any other age restricted product, for example alcohol or cigarettes
- 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.

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



[Respect me](#) have lots of information and resources available on dealing with bullying behaviour.



About us

This Information Guide has been written by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) '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. NHSGGC is not responsible for the content of any external websites listed.

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