

Young People and Vaping

Information for parents
and carers

December 2024

This document is also available in Welsh



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The Essentials

1. Children and young people should not use vapes.
2. Many young people who have never smoked are now vaping.
3. Vaping is safer than smoking but not without risks. Long-term effects of vaping are not yet fully understood.
4. Smoking is very harmful. Cigarettes are the one legal consumer product that will kill most users: 2 out of 3 smokers will die from smoking unless they quit. Adult smokers who switch to vaping entirely will reduce the harms they experience. But non-smokers and young people should not vape.
5. Most vapes contain nicotine, an addictive substance. Regular use can lead to nicotine dependence, causing cravings and withdrawal symptoms if trying to quit.
6. Nicotine addiction can affect concentration, learning and studying. Withdrawal can disrupt sleep, cause headaches, and impact mental health and mood.
7. It is illegal to sell nicotine-containing vapes to anyone under 18. It is also illegal for adults to buy them on behalf of under-18s.
8. Those selling or suspected of selling nicotine vapes or tobacco products to under-18s can be reported anonymously online to [‘No Ifs. No Butts.’](#)
9. There are concerns about unregulated disposable vapes, known as ‘illicit vapes’, being accessible to children and young people.
10. Illicit vapes do not meet UK safety standards so they may cause harm, especially to those under-18. Illicit vape or tobacco sales can also be reported anonymously online to [‘No Ifs. No Butts.’](#)



Terminology



In this resource, ‘vapes’ means e-cigarettes, vape devices, and refill containers (e-liquids). Vapes do not always contain nicotine. ‘Vapers’ are people who regularly use vapes, and ‘vaping’ means using a vape.



Need to know

Support to quit

- Help Me Quit supports smokers aged 12 years and over who would like to quit, including free stop smoking medication.
- Help Me Quit can also support young vapers. However, we cannot provide them with Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) at this time.
- Call Help Me Quit on **0800 085 2219**, or go to www.helpmequit.wales to get in contact with one of our team in confidence.

What are vapes?

Vapes are battery-powered devices that heat up a liquid to create vapour, which is then inhaled. This liquid, usually called e-liquid, contains a number of chemicals usually including nicotine, though some are nicotine-free. Some vapes can be recharged and used many times, while others are disposable and meant to be thrown away once the liquid is used. You can find vape liquids in different nicotine strengths and many flavours. Sometimes, vapes are designed to look like everyday items such as pens and USB sticks.



How vapes are different from cigarettes



Unlike cigarettes, vapes don't burn tobacco, so there's no smoke or harmful by-products like tar and carbon monoxide. While vapes aren't completely risk-free, they are safer than smoking. Switching from smoking to vaping can significantly reduce health risks for adult smokers who can't quit in other ways.



Where vapes are sold

You might see vapes in colourful packaging on shop counters. Even though advertising vapes on TV or radio (including product placements) is illegal, they often appear on social media and outdoor ads. Many children and teenagers feel that vape marketing is aimed at them.

Risks of illegal substances in vapes

There have been a few cases in Wales where illegal substances, like cannabis and synthetic cannabinoids (sometimes called 'Spice' or 'Mamba'), were found in vapes. Using vapes with these substances is especially risky because the liquids are pre-mixed, so there's no way to know what's in them or how strong they are. However, when people in Wales have become unwell from using vapes containing illegal substances, they have bought these vapes expecting them to contain an illegal drug. There's no evidence that vapes sold as 'normal' nicotine vapes in Wales contain illicit drugs.

To talk to an expert in confidence about drugs, reach out to DAN 24/7

Call **0808 808 2234**

Text **DAN** to **81066** or

Visit www.dan247.org.uk

How many young people are using vapes in Wales?

Most children and teenagers in Wales don't use vapes. However, survey data from Welsh schools show that vaping among young people has increased in recent years.

As parents, it's helpful to be aware of these trends so we can support our children in making informed choices.

Every two years, the Schools Health Research Network (SHRN) asks all students in Wales in Years 7 to 11 to complete a survey. In 2023, the SHRN survey revealed that over a quarter of all students in Years 7 to 11 (25.7%) had tried vaping, with 7% vaping at least once a week. The survey showed that girls are more likely to vape regularly than boys (6.7% v 4.1%), and students in Year 11 (15.9%) are more likely to vape regularly than those in younger year groups. Only 2.7% of students in Years 7 to 11 now smoke regularly, and most of these students also vape.

Why are we concerned about vaping among young people?

Vapes were originally made to help smokers to quit. However, many young people who have never smoked are now vaping. Most vapes contain nicotine, which is addictive. Regular use can make someone dependent on nicotine, affecting their concentration and ability to learn.

There's also evidence that vapes not meeting strict UK quality and safety standards are becoming easier to get, especially disposable ones. Often sold informally through social media or small shops, these 'illicit vapes' could pose extra health risks, especially for those under 18.

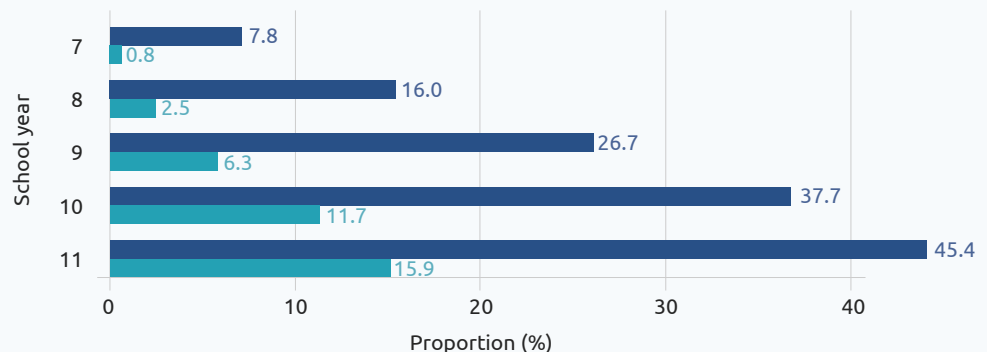
Some illicit vapes have been found to contain:

- Ingredients that vapes in the UK are not allowed to have, such as caffeine, certain colourings, and taurine.
- Much higher concentrations of nicotine, making addiction more likely and affecting health and wellbeing.
- Oversized tanks for e-liquids. Regulated vapes in the UK can only hold up to 2ml of e-liquid, while refill containers can hold up to 10ml.

Vape use by young people in years 7 to 11, by year group, 2023

Source: School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Wellbeing Survey.

- Ever used
- Regularly used



Need to know

What is the law relating to vapes in Wales?

It is illegal in Wales (and England) to:

- Sell vapes containing nicotine to anyone under 18.
- Buy (or attempt to buy) vapes for anyone under 18, known as 'proxy purchase.'

Fines can be issued to retailers or individuals who break these laws.

If you become aware of underage sales or availability of any illegal/illicit vapes in your area please report anonymously online to ['No Ifs. No Butts.'](#)

Health effects including nicotine dependency

Vaping is much less harmful than smoking, but it's not risk-free. We still don't fully understand the long-term effects on health. Most vapes contain nicotine, which can quickly lead to addiction in young people. Nicotine addiction can affect concentration, learning, and studying. Withdrawal can disrupt sleep, cause headaches, and impact mental health and mood.

While research on the long-term effects of vaping is ongoing, long term vape use may affect heart and lung health, especially amongst those who have existing conditions. Health professionals agree that vapes should only be used by adults to quit smoking and not by individuals, especially children and young people, who have never smoked.

The message is clear:

**If you don't smoke,
don't vape!**



The impact of vaping on future tobacco and substance use

Some reviews of the evidence have suggested that young people who have never smoked but use vapes may be more likely to start smoking and become regular smokers than those who haven't vaped. Some evidence also suggests that young people who vape are at an increased risk of becoming addicted to other substances in the future. However, because vapes have only become available in large numbers recently, evidence on the relationship between vaping, smoking and use of other substances is still emerging.

While many young people who vape also use other substances, including cigarettes, it's important to note that a significant number who vape do not use other substances.

The advertising and promotion of vapes

Health and education professionals are concerned that the advertising and promotion of vapes strongly appeal to children and young people. Many children and teenagers feel that vapes are marketed directly at them. Vapes come in many different flavours and colours, with packaging and designs that can be very attractive to young people, like cartoon characters on the packaging and devices designed to look like everyday items. Disposable vapes are also often cheaper and readily available in a range of shops, making them more affordable and easier to buy than rechargeable devices.



Need to know

Single use vapes

Selling disposable vapes will be banned in Wales from 1st June 2025.

The aim of the ban is to reduce the environmental damage caused by the use and disposal of single-use vapes and encourage people to use reusable alternatives. The ban of disposables also aims to prevent young people from accessing them.

Adult vapers will still be able to access refillable and reusable vapes.



The UK Government, with the support of the Welsh Government, has introduced a Tobacco and Vapes Bill in 2024 which aims to create the first smoke-free generation.

The Bill introduces measures to stop people from ever starting smoking and becoming addicted to tobacco products, as well as stopping vaping products from being deliberately targeted at children.

The vaping element of the Bill, which covers both nicotine and non-nicotine containing vapes, is expected to:

- Regulate the flavours and contents of vapes.
- Reduce the appeal and attractiveness of packaging.
- Reduce the visibility of vapes and vape products in shops.

Loopholes which currently allow the sale of non-nicotine vapes and the free distribution of nicotine containing vapes to under-18s will also be closed.

Why do young people try vaping?

Teenagers' brains are still growing and not fully developed. The part of their brain responsible for thinking things through (awareness of consequences) is still developing, while the part that deals with emotions and instincts is much more developed, which means it tends to take over.

Because of this, teenagers can't always think through the consequences of their actions. As a result, they're more likely to try things like vaping out of curiosity or 'for fun' without considering the harm they could be doing to themselves.

Vapes are colourful and come in lots of different flavours, which can seem appealing to young people. They don't seem as scary or harmful as cigarettes.

Many young people really want to fit in with their friends and are scared of being rejected. This means they can sometimes be persuaded to do things they don't particularly want to do or know they shouldn't do, just to avoid feeling left out.

In some cases, young people try vaping as they think it will help them feel less anxious or stressed.



Cost implications

While vapes are cheaper than cigarettes, regular use can quickly become expensive. For adults looking to quit smoking, using free stop smoking medication alongside the expert support provided by [Help Me Quit](#) can help you stop smoking and start saving.

Signs your child may be vaping

It's usually fairly easy to tell if your child's been smoking, as the smell is a real giveaway. However, it can be harder to tell if they're vaping. There are no definitive signs your child is vaping, but some things to look out for include:

- Many vapes have sweet flavours like vanilla or bubble gum, so be aware of smells like that.
- If your child seems more moody, jittery, or irritable than usual, it could be a sign of nicotine addiction. This may also disrupt their sleep and cause headaches.
- Vaping can dry out your mouth, so if your child seems thirsty all the time, this could be another sign.
- Vaping can also make you cough more than usual.
- Make sure you know what vapes look like. Some can look like pens or flash drives, making them easy to hide in plain view.

Sometimes the best way to find out whether your child has any experience of vaping may be to ask them about it.



Top tips for talking to your child about vaping

1. It's good to talk

Open discussions about vaping can help your child feel comfortable coming to you if their friends pressure them to try it or if they've started vaping and want to quit.



2. Look for 'Teachable Moments'

When a story about vaping comes up in the news, in a programme you watch, or when you walk past a vape shop, ask your child what they think. Listen to their views and talk about it calmly and openly. Try not to make them feel like you're lecturing them – it doesn't usually change how they think and feel about vaping.

3. Know your facts

Read up on vaping so you can discuss the risks with your child in a balanced, informed way. You don't need to overload them with information - just make sure you're knowledgeable. The sections above are a great place to start!



Top Tips

What to do if you think your child may be vaping

1. Stay calm

If you suspect or find out that your child has been vaping, you might feel upset or angry. Try to stay calm when you talk to them about it. Shouting and accusing them can be counterproductive. If you need to vent, talk to a friend or family member first.

2. Don't panic

Don't jump to conclusions. Many signs of vaping are also signs of normal adolescent growth and hormonal changes.

3. Pick your moment

Choose a good time for a proper discussion. For example, if you've just found vapes in their room, wait until you've calmed down before talking to them.

4. Plan what to say

Know the facts and stick to your script. Keep the conversation from turning into an argument.

5. Try to Stay Positive

Avoid blaming your child or discussing worst-case scenarios. Instead, focus on how you can support them.

6. Focus on their behaviour

Talk about their behaviour rather than just focusing on vaping. If they've been irritable or tired, mention that you've noticed this and ask if there's anything they'd like to talk about.

7. Listen to what they have to say

Encourage your child to explain why they feel the urge to vape. Understanding their reasons can help you support them. If they vape to reduce stress, help them find other ways to relax. If they feel pressured, help them find ways to say no.

8. Put yourself in their shoes

Growing up is hard, and young people face many pressures. Try to remember what it was like when you were their age and show that you're on their side and want to help, not criticise.



Need to know

Ready to make a positive change for your child's future?

Our habits shape our children's choices. Teens whose parents smoke are up to four times more likely to start smoking themselves.

By choosing to quit smoking or vaping now, you can break the cycle and protect your child's future health. Show them it's possible to make healthier choices by contacting [Help Me Quit](#) to start your journey to a smokefree future.

By using free NHS support and a stop smoking medication you will have the best chance of quitting smoking for good.



Need to know

Getting help and support

If you're concerned about your child vaping, you don't have to cope with the situation on your own. You can talk to your GP or call [Help Me Quit](#) on 0800 085 2219 for advice and support.

Sources of further information

ASH Wales:

www.ash.wales

World Health Organisation (WHO):

www.who.int

No Ifs. No Butts.:

www.noifs-nobutts.co.uk

Help Me Quit:

www.helpmequit.wales

Childline:

www.childline.org.uk

Meic Cymru:

www.meiccymru.org

Talk to Frank:

www.talktofrank.com

Dan 24/7:

www.dan247.org.uk

NHS Wales - Mental Health
and Wellbeing:

www.111.wales.nhs.uk



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank colleagues in Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team for their contribution to the development of this resource.

Special thanks to the Scottish Government for providing permission to reproduce and adapt their original content.





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