

BRIEFING NOTE

Vaping briefing for health care professionals. Version 1. June 2023



Healthcare professionals should be supportive of all patients who smoke switching completely to vapes to help them quit.

Key messages

- Smoking will kill up to 2 out of every 3 long term users.
- Tobacco remains the single biggest cause of preventable death and illness.
- If you smoke, it is far less risky to vape instead. In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking.
- Nicotine vaping is one of the most effective and popular tools for quitting smoking.
- Vaping is not for children and whilst it can help people quit, vaping is unlikely to be risk free. Those who don't smoke should not vape.

Information for patients

Comprehensive FAQs for patients are available at

- www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/ (updated Oct 2022)
- <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/vaping-to-quit-smoking/> (accessed Jun 2023)
- <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/smoking-and-cancer/is-vaping-harmful> (updated Mar 2023)

Key messages to patients include

**The healthiest option is not to smoke or vape.
If you do not smoke, do not start vaping.**

Nicotine vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking:

- Cigarettes release thousands of different chemicals when they burn. Many are poisonous and up to 70 cause cancer. Toxins in tobacco smoke can also cause other serious illnesses, including lung disease, heart disease and stroke.
- Vaping exposes users to far fewer toxins than cigarette smoking, and vapes do not produce tar or carbon monoxide, two of the most harmful substances in tobacco smoke.

Nicotine vaping is one of the most effective tools for quitting smoking:

- You're roughly twice as likely to quit smoking if you use a vape compared with other nicotine replacement products, like patches and gum.

Vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking but that does not mean it is harmless:

- Vaping is not recommended for non-smokers and young people because it is not completely harmless.
- In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking, but that vaping is not risk-free, particularly for people who have never smoked.

Nationally

Overview of the evidence

Nicotine vaping in England: 2022 evidence update. OHID. Sept 2022.

www.gov.uk/government/collections/e-cigarettes-and-vaping-policy-regulation-and-guidance

Overall conclusions included:

- In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking.
- Vaping is not risk-free, particularly for people who have never smoked.
- Evidence is mostly limited to short and medium term effects and studies assessing longer term vaping (for more than 12 months) are necessary.

Electronic Cigarettes for Smoking Cessation: Cochrane Living Systematic Review.

<https://www.cebm.ox.ac.uk/research/electronic-cigarettes-for-smoking-cessation-cochrane-living-systematic-review-1>

A number of resources can be accessed including the latest review on *Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation* (Nov 2022) and the accompanying summary blog at

<https://www.cebm.ox.ac.uk/news/views/7-things-to-know-about-e-cigarettes-and-quitting-smoking> (Nov 2022).

Policy

Supply of free vapes

Smokers urged to swap cigarettes for vapes in world first scheme. Gov Press Release. 11 Apr 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/smokers-urged-to-swap-cigarettes-for-vapes-in-world-first-scheme>

Smokers will be encouraged to swap cigarettes for vapes under a new 'swap to stop' scheme where smokers in England can be provided with a vape starter kit alongside behavioural support to help them quit. This offer will be managed by Local Authorities and hence will be made via the local Stop Smoking Service (Smokefree County Durham <https://www.smokefreecountydurham.co.uk/>). The most at-risk communities will be targeted first.

Note: In addition, the Government is setting up a national portal to enable Local Authorities and the NHS to purchase vapes at a cheaper price. Supplies will be made in bulk to services or sent as individual supplies to patients.

Youth vaping

No more free vapes for kids. Gov Press Release. 31 May 2023.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/no-more-free-vapes-for-kids>

Recent NHS figures for 2021 showed that 9% of 11 to 15 year old children used e-cigarettes, up from 6% in 2018.

A loophole that allows the vaping industry to give free samples of vapes to children in England is set to be closed, alongside increased education in schools (for example, resources from ASH at <https://ash.org.uk/resources/view/ash-brief-for-local-authorities-on-youth-vaping>).

Royal Pharmaceutical Society

The RPS *E-cigarettes policy* (Mar 2022) is available at

<https://www.rpharms.com/recognition/all-our-campaigns/policy-a-z/e-cigarettes>

Royal College of General Practitioners

The joint statement from Cancer Research UK and the RCGP is available at

<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/awareness-and-prevention/e-cigarette-hub-information-for-health-professionals/e-cigarette-statement#keymessages0>

Regionally

Position statements

Association of Directors of Public Health North East Position Statement on Nicotine Vaping (Nov 2022) at <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/our-work/workstreams/health-and-prevention/tobacco-programme/>. This states for example that:

- 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 5,000 people in the North East dying each year from smoking.
- The evidence is clear that, for smokers, vaping is a far less risky option and, in the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking. We must ensure that vaping is an affordable and accessible alternative for smokers who want to reduce their risk of dying from a smoking-related disease.
- At the same time, we recognise that vaping is not risk-free and therefore vaping must be presented as an alternative to or replacement for smoking, not an activity which is appealing to the wider non-smoking population.
- Vaping is not for children and whilst it can help people quit smoking, those who don't smoke should not vape.

North East North Cumbria ICB Smokefree NHS/Treating Tobacco Dependency Taskforce: Position Statement on Nicotine Vaping (Apr 2023) at

<https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/our-work/workstreams/health-and-prevention/tobacco-programme/>. This states for example:

- The evidence is clear that, for smokers, vaping is a far less harmful option and, in the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking. Completely switching to vaping should be promoted as an accessible, less harmful alternative for smokers who want to reduce their risk of developing a smoking-related disease. However, only a small proportion of adults who smoke accurately believe that vaping is less harmful than smoking. We support healthcare professionals to have discussions with their patients, based on the evidence, to ensure smokers understand that completely switching to vaping is a significantly less harmful option than continuing to smoke.

Current services

The NENC ICB is currently rolling out a staff tobacco dependency offer available to all NHS staff working who smoke and work in NHS Foundation Trusts. This includes a direct supply of vapes as a refillable e-liquid (<https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/our-work/workstreams/health-and-prevention/tobacco-programme/>).

Future developments

Across the Region, work is underway to streamline the vaping products that are provided to patients (as *The NENC Smokefree NHS/ Treating Tobacco Dependency Taskforce Vaping Standard* which will be available at <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/our-work/workstreams/health-and-prevention/tobacco-programme/>). It is likely that refillable e-liquids will be first line and disposable pods will be available for more vulnerable groups.

Locally

Current services

The NENC ICB is piloting a national model of stop smoking support for those with severe mental illness (SMI) (<https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/our-work/workstreams/health-and-prevention/tobacco-programme/>). Smokefree County Durham is directly supplying free pharmacotherapy (including vapes) to patients with SMI in the Chester-le-Street area.

Future developments

Smokefree County Durham will provide free vapes as part of their offer (except to pregnant women).