



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Children & Young People and Vaping Position Statement

**Telford & Wrekin Health & Wellbeing
Board**

September 2023

1. Background

There is growing concern regarding the level of children and young people who are vaping and the recent [Smokefree Youth GB survey 2023¹](#) shows a significant increase in the number of children and young people who vape. A decade ago, less than 6% of 11–17-year-olds reported experimenting with vapes compared to 11.6% in 2023 – this figure had increased from 7.7% in 2022.

This position statement summarises the most recent evidence and current understanding of the risks of vaping amongst young people under 18 years of age, and shares key messages intended to help inform young people, their parents and carers, as well as those who work with children and young people.

2. What is Vaping?

Vaping devices (commonly referred to as ‘vapes’ or ‘e-cigarettes’) are electronic devices that allow the user to inhale a vapour. Vapes work by heating a solution, known as an e-liquid, that typically contains propylene glycol and vegetable glycerine. Vaping devices also usually contain nicotine - the addictive chemical found in cigarettes, allowing the user to inhale nicotine in a vapour rather than smoke. E-liquids can be nicotine-free; it is common for them to have added flavourings that make them more palatable to the user. Currently in the UK, the most popular brands are ElfBar and Lost Mary.

Vapes come in many different forms: Cigalikes, vape pens, mods, and pod mods. These can be reusable or disposable. A recent survey¹ from the charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) found that single use disposable vapes are the most popular choice amongst 11–17-year-olds. 69% said that their most frequently used device was a disposable vape. Companies also use packaging design and appealing flavours to help market their products, which is more enticing to the younger user.

Vapes are useful for reducing harm to adult smokers, by encouraging smokers to use vapes as an alternative to tobacco and to aid in quitting smoking altogether. Vaping is not completely risk free, particularly for people who have never smoked and should not be presented as an appealing activity to the wider non-smoking population.

3. The Evidence

Vaping has been proven to be an effective tool to aid in quitting smoking. The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends vaping² as a highly effective treatment option to offer to people who smoke.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) published a thorough review of the evidence on nicotine vaping within the [Nicotine Vaping in England: 2022 update³](#). They concluded that:

- in the short to medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risk of smoking
- vaping is not risk free, particularly for people who have never smoked
- there is significantly lower exposure to harmful substances from vaping compared with smoking
- there is similar or higher exposure to harmful substances from vaping compared with not using nicotine products

It is important to note that evidence is mostly limited to short and medium term effects, and that studies to assess the long-term risks of vaping are needed.

There is currently limited research around the impact of vaping on the health of children and young people. The true impact of vaping on health will manifest over the coming decades. In the interval the recommendation for young people remains to abstain from consumption of inhaled nicotine⁴.

4. Youth Vaping

The proportion of children experimenting with vapes is growing year on year. The 2023 ASH Smokefree GB Youth Survey found that the number of 'young people trying vaping once or twice' had increased by 50% compared to 2022. They also found that 20.5% of children surveyed in 2023 had tried vaping. Most people had only tried it 'once or twice' and very few went on to become regular vapers. However, regular use of e-cigarettes amongst 11–17-year-olds has increased significantly in the past decade (0.6% in 2014 compared to 3.7% in 2023).

In Telford & Wrekin this equates to over 1,900 young people aged between 11-17 having experimented with vaping in 2023 - a staggering 136% increase compared to 2014. Currently, over 600 members of our youth population are considered regular users.

In 2022⁵ ASH explored the reasons given by children and young people for trying vaping, and the top three responses were:

- 'Just to give it a try'
- 'Other people use them, so I join in'
- 'I like the flavours'

Further 2022 data from ASH⁵ found that most children and young people who vape are current or ex-smokers. The proportion of those who have never smoked who have tried vaping is 11.5%, meaning that 88.5% of young people who have never smoked have also never vaped.

The most common way young people access e-cigarettes is by buying them from a shop, and the second most common way is by being given them by others⁶. This is despite it being illegal to sell or buy nicotine containing vapes for anyone under the age of 18.

There is particular concern regarding the marketing of vapes with designs and flavours that could appeal to children. The Local Government Authority⁷ (LGA) is calling for tougher action on the regulation of vaping products to tackle the growing number of children getting hold of them.

5. Regulation by Trading Standards

In the UK, vapes are regulated for safety and quality. Some unlicensed vapes are sold illegally and have been found to be unsafe, with products not meeting UK quality and safety regulations. Recent research⁸ found unregulated vapes caused exposure to chemicals and toxins at levels that can cause negative health effects, especially in young people.

The Council's Trading Standards Team is responsible for enforcement of the legal provisions governing vaping products. The team provide proactive advice to retailers to sell legitimate vaping products and on their obligations not to sell vaping products to any person under the age of 18.

Any non-compliant products are seized for further investigation. In Telford & Wrekin, over the past year, approximately 2,500 non-compliant products have been seized and appropriate follow up action taken.

To reduce the accessibility of vapes to children, people under the age of 18 should be asked where they got their vape (or cigarette). We encourage members of the public with any information that a shop is selling these products to children to report it to the Citizens Advice Consumer Service. They can call 03454 04 05 06 or make contact via their website at <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/if-you-need-more-help-about-a-consumer-issue/>. All such reports are passed through to Trading Standards for further investigation to help them identify and tackle any problem retailers.

Unfortunately, there is currently a legal loophole that allows free samples of vaping products to be given away to people of any age. Worryingly, 2.1% of youths recently surveyed¹ report that their first vape was given to them by an e-cigarette company.

Recently the LGA⁷ has called for a ban on free samples of vaping products to be given out to people of any age, and advocates for vapes being 'out-of-sight and out-of-reach' to tackle underage sales.

6. Exploitation Concerns

The popularity of vapes with young people means they can be used by criminals, along with alcohol, tobacco and drugs as gifts, to lure children into criminal activity.

Trading Standards has received reports that children have been given vapes by individuals to sell on their behalf away from the shop premises and are paid for doing so. This is worrying in many ways. It enables potential sales outside of retail premises by children to children which are hard to detect. As the child is receiving money for the sales they may find it hard to stop, leaving them more vulnerable to other forms of exploitation.

Signs of exploitation include receiving gifts and rewards, secretive behaviour, use of drugs or alcohol, significant changes in behaviour, becoming withdrawn or suffering a decline in mental health and friendships with older adults. Further information can be found at our Family Connect Hub: [Family Connect \(familyconnecttelford.co.uk\)](http://familyconnecttelford.co.uk). Any concerns regarding a child can be reported online using this link. If a child is in immediate danger- always dial 999.

7. Vaping as a Tool to Aid Quitting

Whilst we do not want children taking up vaping, there is high quality evidence that supports vaping being used as an effective tool to aid in quitting smoking.

There is evidence⁹ to show that vaping is more effective when compared to other forms of nicotine replacement therapies (such as patches and gum). The addition of specialised behavioural support has been shown to lead to more successful quit attempts. Vaping is likely to play an important role in helping the government to achieve its smokefree by 2030 ambition¹⁰.

We know that the majority of children and young people who vape are current or ex-smokers¹ and data from ASH⁶ found that the majority of current regular vapers (those vaping more than once per week) smoked a real cigarette before they smoked an e-cigarette.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a lot of misinformation regarding the harm of vapes. 54% of 11-17-year-olds incorrectly believed that vaping is as or more harmful than smoking¹. It is important to recognise, and communicate to children and young people, that the level of risk from smoking is far greater than vaping, so the two are not confused. ASH has produced a helpful [‘Myth Busting’ fact sheet](#)⁶ which we support the use of in homes and schools to help educate young people.

8. Vaping in non-smokers

It has been shown¹ that most children and young people who are non-smokers, who try vaping, only do it once or twice and do not go on to become regular vapers. However, with a recent increase in the number of young people experimenting with vaping, we want to make sure that there is clear advice and guidance available for young people and professionals.

As stated by Professor Sir Chris Whitty¹¹, the message is simple, “if you don’t smoke, don’t vape”. This statement is supported by the national government and the Royal College of Paediatricians. There is concern from child health specialists that for some children and young people vaping could be a gateway to nicotine addiction. A comprehensive review of the current evidence, published in March 2023¹², concluded that young never-smokers and non-smokers who use e-cigarettes are three times as likely as non-users to start smoking tobacco and to become regular smokers. Vapes aren’t risk free and their long-term impacts are not known. Vaping is not recommended for non-smokers and our advice to young people who don’t smoke is, don’t start and don’t vape.

It is clear that more evidence is needed to help us understand the risks of vaping in children and young people and to help us identify opportunities to reduce access to vapes. Minister Neil O’Brien made a recent call for evidence¹³ on the topic.

9. Local Action on Vaping amongst Children and Young People

In 2022 the government published [The Khan Review: Making Smoking Obsolete](#)¹⁰-with the ambitious target of reducing smoking rates to less than 5% by 2030. This has been a driver for local action on vaping in children and young people within Telford and Wrekin.

As part of this local action, all Telford & Wrekin Schools have adopted a no smoking, no vaping policy. Currently, there is no explicit mention of vaping within the ‘drugs, alcohol and tobacco’ statutory school curriculum. As vaping has become more prevalent, schools across Telford and Wrekin have adapted their curriculum to teach about vaping to reaffirm their no smoking, no vaping stance. The statutory curriculum is due to be updated by the end of 2023. This update may include specific curriculum points on vaping and any necessary changes to the local curriculum will be implemented.

Our local trading standards team have been undertaking covert visits to premises in response to information received, accompanied by underage volunteers. Over the last year we have undertaken a number of these exercises and anyone who sold a vaping product to a person under 18 was subject to a full criminal investigation by Trading Standards with a view to legal action being taken where required in line with the Team’s Enforcement Policy.

10. Key Messages for Action

Message 1:

A co-ordinated approach is needed to tackle the rise in young people vaping.

Action: To tackle the rise in young people vaping we need a whole system approach.

We need to encourage a whole school approach to help educate children on the facts regarding smoking and vaping. We encourage all local schools to continue to educate on their no smoking, no vaping stance. Any necessary changes to the 'drug, alcohol and tobacco' curriculum will need to be implemented following the statutory curriculum update.

We have provided educational resources below that may be helpful to our colleagues in the education sector.

Message 2:

If you don't smoke, don't start vaping.

Action: We need to raise awareness amongst children and young people that vaping is not risk free.

We do not know the long-term impacts of vaping and more research is needed. NICE recommends that 'children, young people and young adults who do not smoke should be discouraged from experimenting with or regularly using e-cigarettes'.

Message 3:

Vaping can be an effective tool to help quit smoking.

Action: Most young people who vape regularly also smoke (or have smoked) and it is important to recognise, and communicate to children and young people, that the level of risk from smoking is far greater than vaping.

We support the use of Myth Busting advice produced by the charity ASH to help educate young people and dispel the myths surrounding vaping harm.

We must be careful when communicating this and balance fact-sharing without seemingly promoting vaping in non-smokers.

Message 4:

It is illegal to sell vapes or buy them for anyone under the age of 18.

Action: Children under the age of 18 should be asked where they got their vapes from.

If pupils are found vaping or smoking the product should be confiscated.

Concerns regarding underage sales in shops can be reported to Trading Standards through the [Citizens Advice online portal](#) or by phoning the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 03454 04 05 06.

Concerns regarding child exploitation can be reported online through Family Connect: [Family Connect \(familyconnecttelford.co.uk\)](#). If a child is in immediate danger- always dial 999.

Message 5:

Vapes need to be kept ‘out-of-sight and out-of-reach’⁷ of children.

Action: Disposable, fruit-flavoured vapes are the e-cigarette of choice for young people.

We need more legislation to help reduce the accessibility and appeal of vapes.

The Health & Wellbeing Board support the LGA call to central government for:

- Vapes to be in plain packaging and kept out of sight behind the counter
- Mandatory age-of-sale signage on vaping products
- A ban on free samples of vaping products to be given out to people of any age

Links to Helpful Information and Online Resources

Action on Smoking and Health:

- [Resources for youth vaping](#)
- [Myth Busting document](#)

Helpful educational resources for schools:

- [PSHE Vaping Lesson Plan](#)
- [Guidance on developing school policies for vaping](#)

Resource for parents and carers:

- [Action for Children: How to talk to a child about vaping](#)

Latest evidence:

- [ASH Smokefree GB Youth 2023 survey](#)
- [OHID: Nicotine vaping evidence update 2022](#)

References

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- ¹ [Use-of-vapes-among-young-people-GB-2023.pdf \(ash.org.uk\)](#)
 - ² [Recommendations on treating tobacco dependence | Tobacco: preventing uptake, promoting quitting and treating dependence | Guidance | NICE](#)
 - ³ [Nicotine vaping in England: 2022 evidence update main findings- GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
 - ⁴ [Impact of vaping on respiratory health | The BMJ](#)
 - ⁵ [Use-of-e-cigarettes-among-young-people-in-Great-Britain-2022.pdf \(ash.org.uk\)](#)
 - ⁶ [ASH-brief-for-local-authorities-on-youth-vaping.pdf](#)
 - ⁷ [Vapes need to be 'out-of-sight and out-of-reach' to tackle underage sales – LGA | Local Government Association](#)
 - ⁸ [Vaping: High lead and nickel found in illegal vapes - BBC News](#)
 - ⁹ [Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation - Hartmann-Boyce, J - 2022 | Cochrane Library](#)
 - ¹⁰ [Making smoking obsolete: summary- GOV. UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
 - ¹¹ [Chief Medical Officer for England on vaping - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
 - ¹² [Electronic cigarettes and health outcomes: umbrella and systematic review of the global evidence - Banks - 2023 - Medical Journal of Australia - Wiley Online Library](#)
 - ¹³ [Minister Neil O'Brien speech on achieving a smokefree 2030: cutting smoking and stopping kids vaping](#)