

# Vaping... the Parents' Guide

## What parents need to know

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## What is vaping?

Vaping is the use of an electronic device to inhale vapour from an 'e-liquid'. The main ingredients found in e-liquids are vegetable glycerine and propylene glycol – food additives which are also commonly found in cosmetics, dog food, and hygiene products. Most e-liquids also contain nicotine, as well as small amounts of flavourings and sweeteners. Despite the Department of Health and Social Care introducing strict regulations and setting a 2% (or 20mg per ml) limit on nicotine strength in e-liquids, there has been a surge in illegal vapes on UK's High Streets which contain illegally high levels of nicotine and unregulated ingredients.

Many vapes may visually resemble traditional cigarettes, USB memory sticks and highlighters. The devices can be sold under such product names as vape pens, Elf Bar, Hexa Go, e-cigars, mods and vapes.

## UK's Law on Vaping

- Vapes and vaping products containing nicotine are age-restricted, and it is illegal for them to be sold to under-18s and for adults to buy them on their behalf.
- Certain ingredients, such as caffeine and taurine, are banned in e-liquids.
- All vapes and e-liquids containing nicotine have to be certified by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) before they can be sold in the UK. You can search for brands on the MHRA website here: [ECIG Dynamic Search | MHRA](#).
- Any product that is not listed on the above website should be returned to the shop it was purchased from, or to your local Trading Standards office.

Research from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) has found that a third of vape products sold in the UK are not compliant with regulations.

If you know of anyone who sells vapes illegally, you can report them to Trading Standards through the Citizens Advice online portal.

## Why are E-Cigarettes bad?

Many young people take up vaping because they see it as completely 'risk-free', however there is mounting evidence about the significant negative health impacts that vaping carries.

Some of the most commonly reported side-effects of vaping include: headaches, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, recurring cough and fatigue.

Many dentists are also now seeing a spike in young patients with 'vape tongue', caused by e-cigarette use. Vape tongue is where you start to lose your taste because of excessive vape use, and symptoms include a numb tongue, failure to taste your vape flavour or experiencing an unpleasant taste from your vape. Vape misuse has also been linked to poor oral health, including gum disease, tooth decay and bad breath as a result of exposure to chemical-filled vapour.

For young people whose brains are still developing, nicotine can be extremely harmful and affect parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood and impulse control. Vaping could also lead to further substance misuse in the future.

- Currently, the long-term effects of vaping are unknown – however, with an increasing list of side effects, it is very worrying what long-term issues may arise in years to come.
- Studies have found at least 60 different chemicals in e-liquids. Where e-liquids are unregulated in the UK, the chemical content is simply unknown.
- Nicotine affects a young person's brain development; a regulated 600 puff vape contains, on average, as much nicotine as a packet of 20 cigarettes
- Vaping can make certain illnesses worse, including asthma.



## Why is vaping so popular among young people?

There has been a dramatic rise in youth use of vapes, with a survey by NHS Digital finding that 'nearly one in five 15-year-olds use e-cigarettes' in 2022.

The increase in youth vaping has coincided with cheap disposable vapes arriving on the UK market. The vapes, often brightly coloured and bear a striking resemblance to highlighters you'd find in a pencil case, are stocked in corner shops and online in a host of different fruity flavours. With shops failing to ID individuals to see if they meet the minimum age requirement of 18 to buy vapes, they are extremely easy to purchase. Online purchases are just as easy if not easier, with websites simply asking the purchaser to confirm they are over the age of 18 with just a click of a button.

Their growing phenomenon may be down to their brightly coloured packaging and fruity flavours, but they're also considerably cheaper than cigarettes. Teens can buy vapes for as cheap as £4, but a 20 pack of Marlboro Gold in leading supermarkets will set you back £14.10 – a figure only set to increase as prices will continue to jump as part of the Government's plans to have a 'smoke-free' England by 2030.



We also have teen idols, like Lana Del Rey, who are often spotted onstage at their concerts and festivals with a microphone and vape in front of tens of thousands of impressionable, young teens.

There is no wonder that these vapes are plastered all over social media, as the hashtag #elfbar (a popular vape brand) currently has over 400 million views, while #vaping has 3.1 billion on the TikTok platform – an app popular amongst children as young as 7 and teens. When scouring the TikTok app, you can also find a host of different accounts reviewing and 'rating' different vapes, with some of these boasting over 10,000 followers.

## How do I talk to my child about vaping?

It may be a good plan to start talking openly with your children about vaping, asking them what they already know, do they see it at school and talking through your concerns.

Be calm, talk to them on the same level and as though it is a general conversation. Bringing up vaping in a natural way is much more effective than sitting them down for a lecture.

Try and educate them early, before they have been exposed to or offered a vape so they have all the information and support they need ready.

If you suspect your child is vaping - Do not accuse them, listen to what they have to say without judgement and calmly state your concerns.

Avoid extremes (i.e. "the vape device will blow up and kill you."). Be factual and fair in delivering the message.



Leave the door open for your child to ask more questions in the future. They should feel safe that they can come to you without judgement or retribution.

## How do I know if my child is vaping?

- You may notice a sweet smell – e-liquids come in thousands of flavors.
- They're spending more money than usual.
- You find pods/cartridges or other unusual devices.
- They're irritable, which can be a sign of withdrawal or cravings.
- They have new or increased coughing, sore throat, difficulty breathing, nausea.
- They experience more or more sudden nosebleeds.
- They're thirsty – nicotine can make you dehydrated.
- They lose concentration easier than usual.

## How can I support my child to quit vaping?

Reacting with anger or intense emotion can make a child defensive and less likely to hear what you have to say. Tell your child you are here to support and help them quit. Find out about the support that is available through the local Stop Smoking Service for helping adults as well as young people to stop vaping.

**If your child is experiencing flu-like symptoms, like coughing, chest pain, difficulty breathing or vomiting, take him or her to the hospital immediately.**

**For support:** Contact the Healthy Schools Team  
Email: [healthyschools@everyonehealth.co.uk](mailto:healthyschools@everyonehealth.co.uk)  
Visit: [healthyschoolscp.org.uk](http://healthyschoolscp.org.uk)

The first step to help your child is to talk openly and without judgement about nicotine addiction and how easy it is to become dependent on nicotine through vape use. If your child is not able to stop using a vape, then nicotine free vapes are available as an option to support quitting and the advice of the local Stop Smoking Service is recommended:

[www.healthyyou.org.uk/services/stop-smoking/](http://www.healthyyou.org.uk/services/stop-smoking/)

It is important to identify any habits or rituals that are associated with your child's vape use. For example, when do they vape, is it only when they are out socialising with friends? It may be helpful to discuss any peer pressure your child may be feeling in relation to vaping. Being able to recognise the 'trigger(s)' for them to vape will allow you both to set up a plan to help break those cycles.

Having a distraction will be a big help. A distraction could be anything from taking up a new hobby, like reading or baking, or starting to exercise more – this could just be going for a simple walk. When cravings kick in, having an easy distraction to turn to will make it a lot easier to ignore and curb those cravings.

Remember, it's important to remind them how well they are doing, and their motivations to quit. Which could be anything from wanting to work out more or the fear of bad breath! Quitting vaping can be tough for both the child and the parent, which is why having a parental support system in place is very helpful when you or they need a helping hand. It may help to speak with other parents, school support such as the pastoral lead as well as the local Stop Smoking Service. Creating a community of trusted adults that are there to help you and your child will help you both on your vape-free journey.

