

Advice and Guidance: Managing Vapes in Schools



ADPH
South East

In recent years, there has been an increase in the availability and general awareness of vapes (also known as e-cigarettes). Nicotine vapes are now the most common stop smoking aid among adults in the UK and the [latest evidence](#) on vapes shows that they are substantially less harmful than smoked tobacco. The availability of vapes now offers an alternative route to quitting for many smokers.

As many of you already know, smoking is the leading preventable cause of premature death in England. Despite an overall decline in prevalence, smoking continues to have a long term, negative impact on smokers, families and communities. Supporting smokers to quit is therefore, the single biggest actionable activity to improve health and reduce inequalities.

However, whilst the availability of vapes offers a unique opportunity for adult smokers to quit, they also bring with them some unique challenges for staff and organisations working with children and young people.

There is [clear advice \(1.6.3\)](#) from NICE (National Institute For Health & Care Excellence) that vapes should not be used by children and young people, or those who do not currently smoke, as nicotine is an addictive substance and the long term risks are not yet known. The [law](#) bans the **sale of nicotine vaping products to persons under 18** and **bans the proxy purchasing of these products** to under-18s by adults.

The [increase in prevalence](#) among young people of this age-restricted product, means organisations working with young people are now facing challenges with managing the presence of vapes within their settings. This document provides advice and guidance on these issues.

(*Full details of the NICE evidence on vaping and the Committee's discussion can be found in [F & G: E-cigarettes and young people \(nice.org.uk\)](#))

Who is this guidance for?

The advice is primarily for:

All Headteachers, school staff, safeguarding leads and governing bodies in maintained schools, academies, free schools, independent schools, sixth form colleges, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and other forms of alternative education provision.

It may also be useful for:

Local authorities, parents/carers, school nurses and other health professionals who have an input on substance use disorders. The police, trading standards teams and local agencies working with individual schools to prevent substance use disorders amongst pupils.



The role of education settings

As part of the [statutory duty](#) to promote pupils' physical, mental health and emotional wellbeing, schools have a clear role to play in managing vapes as part of their pastoral responsibilities. Schools also have a statutory duty to deliver health education on drugs, alcohol, and tobacco ([Physical health and mental wellbeing \(Primary and secondary\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)).

The role schools have in managing vapes may broadly fall into two categories:

1. Managing behaviour related to vapes and vaping
2. Incorporating vaping prevention into the whole school's approach to health and wellbeing, which includes PSHE education and the wider curriculum, school policies, ethos and environment, and partnerships with parents and the local community.

Managing behaviour related to vapes and vaping

Schools may need to tackle problem behaviour associated with vaping, which might include:

- A child vaping in school or on school property
- A child reported to be vaping in the local community
- A child selling vapes to other pupils or peers
- A child being exploited to sell vapes to pupils and peers
- A child being given a vape by a parent as a harm reduction measure compared to smoking (scenario faced by schools)
- A child with vapes in their possession at school



Schools may respond to these behaviours in different ways, depending on factors such as intensity or frequency of behaviour. Vaping should be addressed as early as possible by making vapes a prohibited item using the wider powers of [Searching, Screening and Confiscation](#), and setting out clear expectations for pupils, parents/carers, and staff in a school policy (this may be a separate policy of vaping and vaping products/or smoking and vaping or incorporated into the overall behaviour policy). It might be helpful to read through the [brief guidance](#), produced by ASH, on developing school policies on vaping, and adopt a proportionate response to exclusion and punishment.



Public Health England's '[Use of E-cigarettes in Public Places and Workplaces: Advice to inform evidence-based policy making](#)' outlines considerations when developing the rationale for your policy.

It may be helpful to enlist the support and advice of local voluntary organisations, health partners (such as school nursing), the police and others.

Guidance can also be found in [DFE & ACPO Drugs Advice for Schools](#).

Screening, Searching and Confiscation

When developing school policy on vapes, it is recommended that schools prioritise the risk of youth uptake and treat vapes in the same way as other age restricted products, such as alcohol and tobacco, by prohibiting them onsite as a first step, and then confiscating and disposing of them.

The school policy should also outline safeguarding and supporting procedures for pupils using or possessing these, with the aim of ensuring young people are offered/ given the support they need as a priority.

Department of Education Guidance on [Searching, Screening and Confiscation](#) to help develop your policies has also been recently updated, and can be cross referenced with recently published [Behaviour in Schools Guidance](#).

Whilst vapes are not explicitly listed as prohibited items on Pg.7 of the [Searching, Screening and Confiscation](#) document, schools can choose to add them to the list of banned products for which searches and confiscation can apply. Schools will need to ensure that vapes are also added to other relevant policy documents for consistency, such as School Behaviour Policies.

Disposing of confiscated vapes and vaping liquids

Single use disposable vapes contain electrical components, including lithium-ion batteries, and are therefore considered Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), in UK law. Such equipment should never be disposed of in household waste and should instead be handed in to an approved collector of WEEE waste. Larger vape stores may operate collection points, or you can contact your local authority waste service for further information.

Storage

The lithium-ion batteries contained in vapes have, in isolated incidents, ignited when damaged or improperly stored. The advice is to store them in a clearly marked container, away from flammable material (and for no longer than necessary) until you can dispose of them.



Following up on vaping behaviour

Schools should have a process in place to respond when vapes are identified through searching and screening, or vaping behaviour is observed, or reported in the setting or school community. This might involve:

- Exploring any safeguarding concerns, mental or physical health concerns, or other potential risk behaviours, such as substance use.
- Exploring how any confiscated vapes were obtained and reporting any illegal sales.
- Communication with parents or carers about the pupil's behaviour, the school's policy, and rationale for the screening, searching, confiscation, disposal of the vapes and vaping products, and any suggested onward support.
- Making relevant referrals, or providing advice & signposting to the pupil and their family.
- Responding to any safety incidents.
- Awareness of and responding to any social media trends

This is discussed in more detail in the next sections

Working with other local agencies

When schools are developing policy and process around vaping, they may find it helpful to collaborate with local agencies for support.

Trading standards teams, found within local councils (unitary or upper tier local authority), should be approached if schools have concerns about underage sales of vapes and/or tobacco in their local community. These teams are also keen to be informed of any activity relating to illicit vape or tobacco products.

If you find a retailer selling either nicotine vapes or tobacco products to under-18s, you can **report a retailer** (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/report-to-trading-standards/>) to Local Authority Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice portal.

If you wish to report an incident to Trading Standards or you require advice, please contact the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on **0808 223 1133** or by email using the form at <http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/england.htm>.

Information will be forwarded to the relevant Trading Standards Service.



Illicit products may pull crime into local areas. Therefore, if appropriate, Police may also need to be made aware. This is a consideration that schools should address as part of their safeguarding policies and procedures, and behaviour policy. According to [Searching, Screening and Confiscation](#), being in possession of a prohibited item “may mean that the pupil is involved, or at risk of being involved, in anti-social or criminal behaviour including gang involvement, and in some cases may be involved in child criminal exploitation”.

Where devices are confiscated, it is encouraged that information regarding the source is disclosed by the pupil. Information regarding illegal supply should be reported to Trading Standards or Police, if the supply is as a result of an improper relationship with the pupil. A search may play a vital role in identifying pupils who may benefit from early help or a referral to the local authority children's social care services. Local safeguarding teams should be informed of any concerns, as per schools' standard escalation processes. See [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) and [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Community stop smoking services are a local resource for advice and guidance. Some may offer access to support for young people wishing to quit smoking cigarettes and all will help family members to quit smoking.

Vapes are not recommended for people under 18 years as a quitting aid ([NICE Guideline NG209](#)) but community stop smoking services can offer behavioural support and other nicotine replacement products, licensed for use by children and young people.

Community stop smoking services are currently not commissioned to support adults or children to stop vaping, but some will be able to offer information and advice available from the [National Centre for Smoking Cessation & Training](#).

If the vaping is suspected to be linked to other concerns such as mental health or substance disorder use, then pupils may also be referred/signposted to local school nursing services or local CaMHS/substance use services.

Responding to safety incidents relating to vaping

In the unlikely event of an adverse reaction associated with vaping, this should be reported to the MHRA (Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) via the [Yellow Card Scheme](#). The more information that can be provided in the online form about the product used, the better.

Some schools report concerns that vaping devices could be used and/or modified for delivering other substances, for example cannabis or ketamine, etc. The management of these situations are covered in the [Screening, Searching and Confiscation Guidance](#) and should be incorporated into school drug and/or behavioural policies. Support should be sought from relevant partners, such as drug and alcohol services, police, and safeguarding.



Incorporating vaping into a whole school approach

In the longer term, schools might respond to vaping by making it a part of their whole school approach to health and well-being. This might involve:

- Considering how the physical environment promotes vaping, for example are there any areas of the school site where vaping is regularly reported
- Supporting all staff to feel confident in their knowledge of vaping, its risks (and benefits for adult smokers), and the law, through resources and training
- Exploring how it can be linked to the school's ethos, culture and values, for example around sustainability and the environment, or a positive sense of health and well-being
- Teaching about vaping as part of the PSHE education curriculum (PHSE Association [year 9 lesson now available](#))
- Sharing information, resources & signposting with parents and carers
- Ensuring all staff are aware of support services that may be available, such as Local Stop Smoking Support Services, School nurses etc.

Some local authorities also commission smoking prevention training/programmes, which offer guidance and support for schools. Contact your local public health team or PSHE education lead/Healthy Schools lead for more information on what's available in your area.

Resources and Training for Staff

Free resources on vaping and young people:

[Chief Medical Officer for England on vaping](#)

[ASH-brief-for-local-authorities-on-youth-vaping.pdf](#)

[ASH-guidance-for-school-vaping-policies.pdf](#)

[Vaping factsheet for professionals working with young people](#)

[Vapes | FRANK \(talktofrank.com\)](#)

OHID resource for schools on vaping – new resources aimed at Years 7 and 8 available on [Better Health School Zone](#) for start of 2023/24 academic year

PSHE Association:

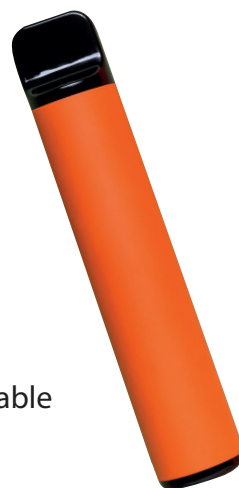
<https://pshe-association.org.uk/news/where-is-vaping-covered-in-our-materials>

[Vaping year 9 lesson pack \(pshe-association.org.uk\)](#)

Sheffield City Council resources:

- A short, [animated film](#) to start discussions in PSHE lessons, form times and assemblies. Animation also available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rod4d4yFeaE>.
- [Classroom presentation](#) for use by teachers alongside the animated film. Notes pages [here](#).
- A Teachers Toolkit with more detail to back up the classroom presentation is available.
- [Electronic leaflet](#) for parents and carers to share via newsletters or emails etc. Further materials are available and if you would like to order and purchase printed copies of these resources contact: smokefreesheffield@divacreative.com

[Supporting clients who want to stop vaping \(ncsct.co.uk\)](#) – this guide is aimed at specialist stop smoking advisers, so may be helpful for school nurses.



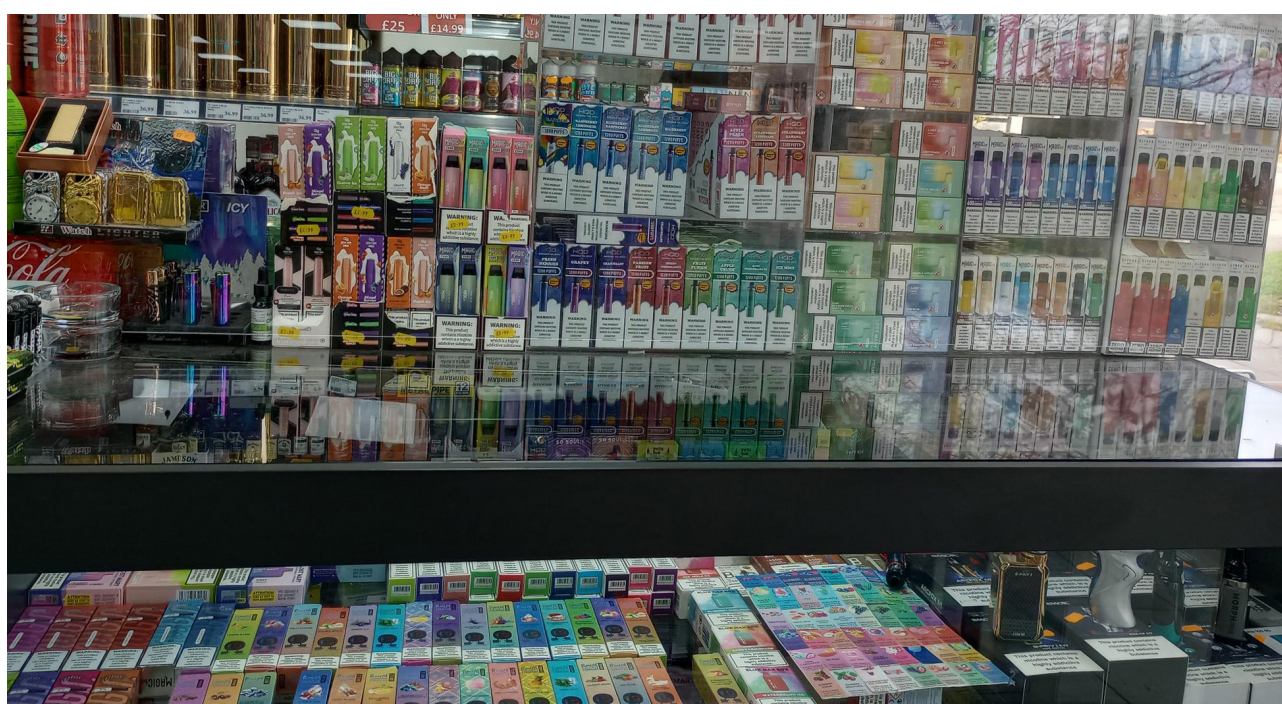
Resources to support pupils, staff, families, and carers to quit smoking:

Schools should be aware that some parents and carers may be smokers, with many making positive steps to a quit with the help of a vape. The resources below may be helpful for staff to be supportive of this.

[Vaping to quit smoking - Better Health - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/vaping-to-quit-smoking)

[Using e-cigarettes to stop smoking - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking)

[Find Your Local Stop Smoking Service \(LSSS\) - Better Health - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/find-your-local-stop-smoking-service-lsss)



This guidance has been prepared by a Task and Finish Group of the ADPH South East Tobacco Control Network, using the most up to date information available at time of publication.

