Information and Guidance on Vaping for Secondary-aged learners in Wales

Compiled by the Tobacco Control Team and Educational Settings Team, Health Improvement Division, Public Health Wales

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Version 1

This information resource has been developed for use with secondary-aged learners in Wales. It can be adapted for use in other settings such as further/higher education, special and alternative education and other youth settings.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank colleagues in Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team and members of the Vaping Incident Response Group for their contribution to the development of this resource.

This document is also available in Welsh.

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Key Messages

- Vaping devices should not be used by children and young people

- It is illegal to sell nicotine-containing vaping devices to anyone under 18 or for adults to buy them on behalf of under-18s. Those selling or suspected of selling either nicotine vapes or tobacco products to under-18s can be reported anonymously to ‘No Ifs. No Butts.’

- There are growing numbers of illegal or illicit vaping devices on sale that don’t meet the stringent quality and safety standards within the UK. These devices can be particularly dangerous as some have been found to contain very high levels of nicotine and dangerous metals like lead. Others are labelled as being nicotine-free when they do contain nicotine. Illegal vapes have been found in schools in the UK

- Vaping is safer than smoking but it is not harmless. The evidence on the long-term health effects of vaping is limited as it has not been around long enough to know the risk of long-term use

- Vaping can lead to dependence on nicotine[1]. Dependence on nicotine can negatively affect mental health and wellbeing and can be disruptive to life and learning

- Adult smokers can reduce the risk of harm from smoking by switching completely to vaping, however vaping is not recommended for non-smokers (and should not be used by children and young people)

- If an adult, child or young person under 18 requires support to quit smoking they should seek advice from Help Me Quit, where they will be guided to the appropriate treatment pathway (age 12+)

- If a person wishes to quit vaping they can also contact the national Help Me Quit helpline on 0800 085 2219 for advice and support.

What are vaping devices?

Vaping devices are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid to produce an aerosol that is inhaled. The liquid usually contains nicotine, although some vapes are available without nicotine.

There has been a rapid increase in the use, availability and promotion of vaping devices. Vapes were originally marketed as an alternative to smoking cigarettes and have gained popularity amongst some adults trying to quit smoking. Vaping devices are sometimes made to look like everyday items such as pens and USB memory sticks.

The function of vaping devices is to vaporise and deliver to the lungs of the user a chemical mixture, typically composed of nicotine, propylene glycol and other chemicals.

Unlike cigarettes, there is no combustion (burning) involved in vaping devices, so there is no smoke and no other harmful products of combustion, such as tar and carbon monoxide. This does not mean they are entirely safe, but they are understood to be less harmful than smoking as they do not contain the tar, carbon monoxide and other products that cause many smoking related illnesses. Switching completely from smoking to vaping significantly reduces the health harm for smokers who are unable or unwilling to quit.

Vapes are available in a range of nicotine concentrations, are either rechargeable or disposable, and come in a variety of flavours.

Research in Wales has found a range of substances (including cannabis based substances) present in vaping devices[2]. There are potential concerns around the use of vapes to consume cannabis or other synthetic cannabinoid substances as the nicotine consumed through vaping devices can enhance the addictive properties of these substances[3].

For information and support on the harms of illegal substances, please contact DAN 24/7.

Need to know

The terms 'vaping device(s)' and 'vaping product(s)' are used in this resource to describe e-cigarettes, ENDS (electronic nicotine delivery systems) or vapes and refill containers (e-liquids) intended for nicotine vaping. Vaping devices do not always contain nicotine. We use the term 'vapers' to refer to people who regularly use vaping devices and 'vaping' as the act of using a vaping product.

Whether a device contains nicotine or not is an important distinction in law. Vapes **without nicotine** can be sold to anyone at any age. Although it is not always possible to distinguish between vaping devices that contain nicotine and those that do not, if information is passed to Trading Standards about learners acquiring vaping devices from a specific source, action can only be taken relating to those that are nicotine-containing.

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How many young people are using vaping devices?

Most children and young people don't vape. However, studies including the School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Wellbeing Survey in Wales have shown that the use of vaping devices among children and young people in the UK has been on the rise in recent years[4].

SHRN data show patterns of experimental and regular vape use relating to age, gender and family affluence[4]:

- 1 in 5 secondary aged learners (20%) from Year 7 to 11 had ever tried vapes

- 5% of secondary aged learners reported use of vapes regularly (defined as at least weekly)

- Year 11 learners were more likely to use a vaping device at least weekly (14%) compared with Year 7 learners (1%) (Figure 1)

- Secondary aged learners from less affluent families were the most likely to have tried vapes and to use them regularly

- A higher proportion of year 7 to 11 girls (7%) reported vaping at least weekly compared with boys (4%). Amongst young people who identified as neither a boy nor a girl, 8% reported vaping at least weekly (Figure 2).

Recent investigations undertaken by Public Health Wales and partner organisations suggest that the prevalence of vaping has remained high and probably increased further since the 2021/22 SHRN Student Health and Wellbeing Survey was undertaken.

We will continue to monitor this over time.

SHRN

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) is a policy-practice-research partnership between **Welsh Government**, **Public Health Wales** and **Cardiff University** established in 2013. SHRN aims **to improve young people's health and wellbeing in Wales** by working with schools in both primary and secondary education to generate and use good quality evidence for health improvement.

SHRN conducts student and school level surveys, capturing key health and wellbeing metrics. Schools that join the Network receive an individualised Student Health and Wellbeing report every two years. This is based on learner responses to an electronic Student Health and Wellbeing Survey which schools undertake. These reports provide member schools with data on key emotional and physical health topics with national data for comparison.

Figure 1: The percentage of learners who use e-cigarettes at least weekly by year group

This figure shows that the proportion of learners reporting vaping at least once per week increases with age.
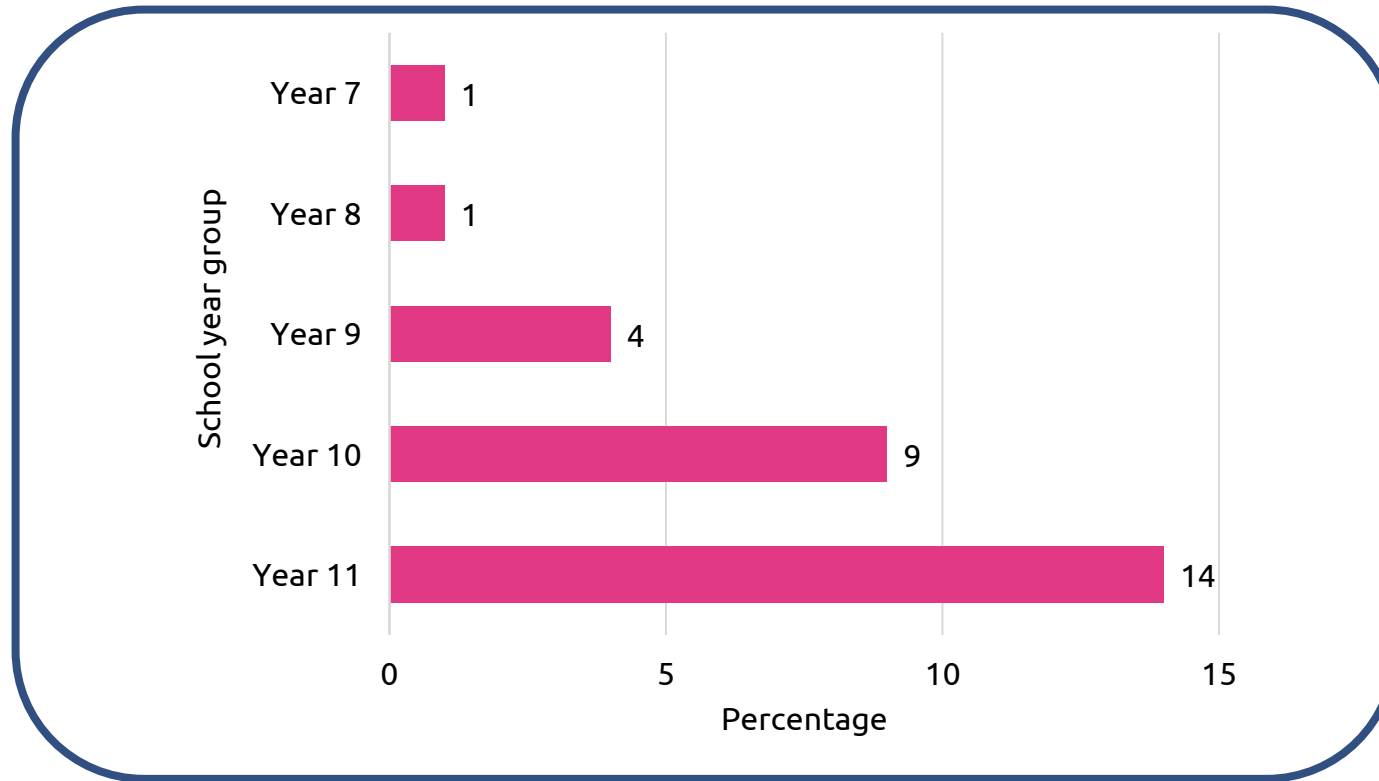
Base: All respondents in years 7 to 11 who gave an answer, surveyed between Sep 2021 and Jan 2022 (n=55,334).
Source: **School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey** (2021/22).

Figure 2: The percentage of learners who use e-cigarettes at least weekly by gender

This figure shows that a higher proportion of girls (7%) compared with boys (4%) reported using a vaping device at least weekly. Of those who identified as neither a girl nor a boy, 8% reported use at least weekly.
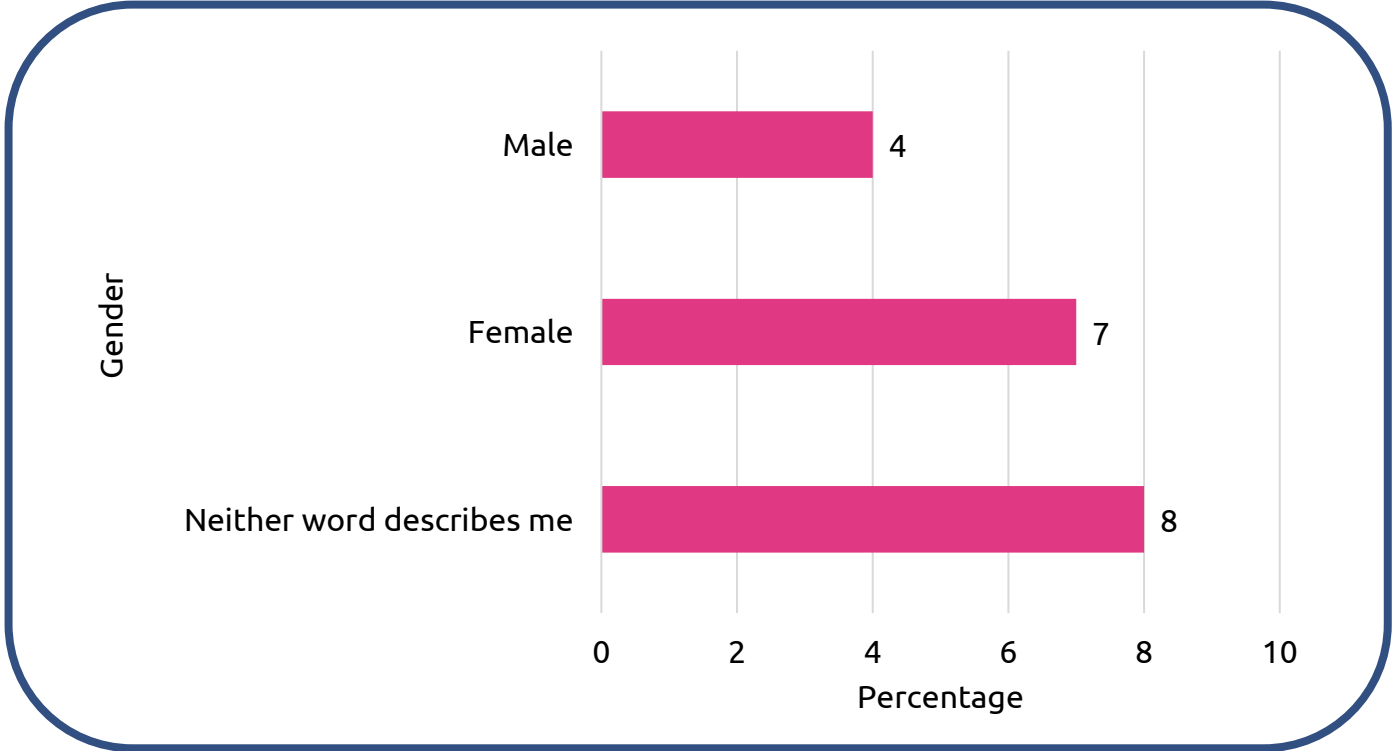
Base: All respondents in years 7 to 11 who gave an answer, surveyed between Sep 2021 and Jan 2022 (n=54,522 – excludes 812 gender non-response).
Source: **School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey** (2021/22).

Why are young people vaping?

The growing literature on what motivates young people to vape cites a number of factors such as peer influence, social image, perceived lower health risks of vapes compared with cigarettes, 'just to give it a try' and because they 'like the flavours'.[5,6]

Other common reasons for vaping include to support mental health, reduce stress levels and address low self-esteem. Vapes are used as a perceived coping mechanism to address these[6]. However teens who vape for stress relief report significantly higher stress levels than young people who don't vape[6].

These findings are similar to adolescent cigarette smoking behaviour, whereby cigarette smoking is commonly perceived as a way to relieve stress[7].

Supporting learners' mental wellbeing

Implementing a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing can enable schools to protect and improve the mental wellbeing of young people, helping them to build resilience and reduce engagement in risky behaviours – see Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing – Public Health Wales for further guidance.

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Why is there concern about vaping amongst young people?

1. Health effects including nicotine addiction

Evidence regarding the long-term health effects resulting from the use of vaping devices is very limited.

There is substantial evidence that using nicotine-containing vaping devices results in symptoms of dependence in non-smokers[8]. Young people using vaping devices are more likely to become addicted, have more difficulty quitting and are at higher risk of addiction to other substances in the future[9].

There is recent evidence that vaping products containing nicotine can cause poisoning if ingested and immediate inhalation toxicity (including seizures) particularly in children and adolescents, although this is very rare[1]. Malfunctioning devices can cause injuries and burns[1].

Nicotine intake from vaping devices can vary and is dependent on a number of both product and user characteristics. Nicotine exposure from vaping tends to increase when[8]:

- Using e-liquids with higher nicotine concentration
- Using tank or modular type vaping devices which provide more exposure than disposable models
- People who have been vaping for longer, as they have more effective puffing behaviour

Signs and symptoms of nicotine dependency may include[9]:

- Mood changes, irritability, poor behaviour, hyperactivity

Symptoms of nicotine intake may include[1]:

- Headache, cough, throat irritation, dizziness, and nausea

Further research is needed to increase our understanding of the mechanisms underlying nicotine exposure during adolescence, and the potential short-and long-term health effects.

2. Vaping and its impact on subsequent tobacco use and use of other substances

A number of long-term studies have shown that young people who have never smoked but who use vaping devices are more likely to start tobacco smoking and become regular smokers than those who have not used vapes[1]. There is emerging evidence that also suggests young people who vape are at an increased risk of addiction to other substances in the future[9].

Whilst there is evidence that many of the young people using vapes are also using other substances, including cigarettes, it is important to note that a significant number who vape are not using other substances.

3. The marketing and promotion of vapes

There are concerns about the marketing and promotion of vaping devices and how these may appeal to children and young people. For example, vaping devices may be offered in flavours and colours with packaging and designs (to look like a highlighter pen for example) that can be particularly attractive to young people. New market innovations such as disposable vapes are often cheaper and therefore more affordable to young people and are widely sold.

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What is the law relating to vapes and vaping in Wales?

It is illegal in Wales and England:

- To sell vaping devices, electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) or e-liquids containing nicotine to anyone under 18

- For adults to buy (or try to buy) vaping devices or e-cigarettes for anyone under 18. This is known as 'proxy purchase'.

Fines can be issued to retailers or individuals breaking the law.

In the UK, vaping devices are regulated under the **Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016**. These Regulations stipulate that vaping devices must either be licensed as medicines or, if unlicensed, are subject to quality and safety standards:

- Restriction on e-cigarette tanks to a capacity of no more than 2ml

- Restriction on the maximum volume of nicotine-containing e-liquid for sale in one refill container to 10ml

- Restriction on e-liquids to a nicotine strength of no more than 20mg/ml

- Requirement for nicotine-containing products or their packaging to be child-resistant and tamper evident

- A ban on certain ingredients including colourings, caffeine and taurine

- Requirement for new labelling requirements and warnings

- Requirement for all e-cigarettes and e-liquids to be notified and published by the MHRA before they can be sold.

All legitimate vaping devices and products, including e-liquids must carry the following warning on their label:

"**This product contains nicotine which is a highly addictive substance.**"

The UK Advertising Codes include rules to ensure that vaping devices are promoted responsibly. The rules require that vape adverts should not target children.

These regulations aim to protect public health and reduce the potential harm that vaping device use could cause for individuals who are under the age of 18 and those who use vaping devices as an alternative to tobacco products.

This product contains Nicotine which is a highly addictive substance.

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Why are we concerned about illegal/illicit vaping devices and vaping products?

Trading Standards Officers in Wales and across the UK report that the market is being flooded with unregulated, disposable vaping devices aimed at children and young people. This is a concern since these illicit products are often sold in informal, unregulated marketplaces (including via social media) and in small retailers, diminishing the regulations put in place to protect children and young people from the potential harms of vaping.

Illicit vaping devices and products could pose additional health risks to individuals who are under the age of 18 as well as to those who use vaping devices as an alternative to tobacco products. Illegal or illicit vaping devices are not regulated by the UK standards. Studies of illegal vapes have found them to:

- Contain ingredients that are banned in the UK such as caffeine, certain colourings and taurine

- Contain a much higher concentration of nicotine that can lead to an increase in nicotine addiction and associated adverse health effects

- Be sold in packaging which does not comply with UK Regulations i.e. does not have any nicotine warnings on it

- Have an oversized tank capacity. Disposable electronic cigarettes, cartridges and tanks can contain a maximum of 2ml of e-liquid, while dedicated refill containers can contain up to 10ml.

What can I do if I suspect the sale of illegal/illicit vaping devices and vaping products?

If you become aware of underage sales or availability of any illegal/illicit vaping devices or products in your area please report anonymously to 'No Ifs. No Butts.'.

DIM ESGUS. BYTH. NO IFS. NO BUTTS.

How can schools respond to and address vaping amongst young people?

Based on current evidence and **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)** Guidance (2023)[10], Public Health Wales advises schools to undertake the following **10 Key Actions** in relation to vaping, alongside other priority areas as part of their curriculum delivery and implementation of a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing:

1. Understand patterns of vaping behaviour amongst young people in your school

2. Understand how your learners obtain or gain access to vaping devices

3. Develop relevant Curriculum learning aligned with the four purposes/Statements of What Matters

4. Review your school policies and practices

5. Communicate with your school community

6. Provide a call to action to the school community

7. Participate in Programmes/Networks and access sources of support

8. Support young people to stop vaping

9. Keep learning and building your own and others' knowledge

10. Participate in School Health Research Network

Further information about the Key Actions is provided in the following section.

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Key Action 1. Understand patterns of vaping behaviour amongst young people in your school

The SHRN Student Health and Wellbeing Survey collects anonymous learner responses on tobacco and vape use enabling you, through your school's feedback report, to gain a picture of regular, irregular and experimental use amongst learners at your school and how this is changing over time.

The report also provides the national year-on-year average for each measure and the interactive SHRN dashboard enables you to break down measures by local authority and health board area, helping you to understand how vaping behaviours at your school compare with other areas and Wales wide.

Your report and the dashboard also help you to better understand your and the national age profile alongside other learner characteristics (gender and socio-economic status), so this can be reflected in the timing of your curriculum delivery or prevention activity.

You might complement your SHRN report with other sources of intelligence. For example:

- What do your behavioural reporting systems tell you about vaping device use in your school?

- What are staff, learners', and the community's reported experiences?

Key Action 2. Understand how your learners obtain or gain access to vaping devices

Understanding how learners obtain or gain access to vaping devices can help inform your response to vaping within your setting.

This information is not currently available via the SHRN survey but talking to learners, staff and the community will help you better understand how young people in your setting have access to vaping devices below the minimum legal age. This will help inform strategies to reduce access to vapes for learners. These might include:

- Addressing any buying or selling of vapes between learners

- Communication with parents to ensure they are aware of the law and of school policy

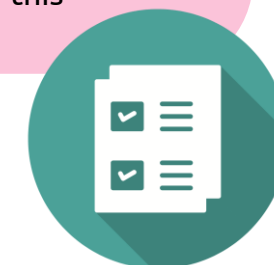- Reporting anonymously any outlets which are illegally selling vapes to learners to 'No Ifs. No Butts.'.

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Key Action 3. Develop relevant Curriculum learning aligned with the four purposes/Statements of What Matters

Key points for including education about vaping within your school curriculum:

- Education about vaping and vaping devices should be delivered as part of broader substance misuse education which recognises that children and young people need the opportunity to develop the knowledge to respond to a wide spectrum of substances, including novel substances they may not yet have encountered, through a common set of critical appraisal, decision-making and risk assessment skills

- Education about vaping and vaping devices should complement and not replace smoking prevention education

- Education about vaping and vaping devices should avoid describing vaping and smoking behaviours as equally harmful. This is not evidence-based and risks reducing credibility of the curriculum as a trusted source of information. It may create dissonance with home experiences where vaping devices may reasonably be used as a smoking cessation aid and risks redirverting young people to smoking (which carries significantly greater health harm)

- Education about vaping and vaping devices should be appropriately planned and timed within your curriculum. The national SHRN Student Health and Wellbeing report alongside your school SHRN report can help you identify the age profile of vaping behaviour and plan curriculum delivery accordingly

- Opportunities to include learning about vaping and vaping devices are across the curriculum. For example, education about vaping and vaping devices may be used as a topic for meeting learner needs within the Science and Technology, Humanities and Health and Wellbeing Areas of Experience and Statements of What Matters. We have included some suggested curriculum learning about vaping at the end of this information resource.

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Key Action 4. Review your school policies and practices

a. Smoking or Substance use policies

Whilst vaping and vaping devices are not covered by smokefree legislation, school smoking and/or substance use policies should be extended to include vaping and vaping devices.

The use of vaping devices on school grounds by staff, visitors and parents should be prohibited. Adults who are using vapes to support them to quit smoking can seek free behavioural support and Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) from Help Me Quit.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines set out the principles for whole school smoke and vape free policies[10]. Based on this, **your policy should**:

- Clearly apply the same prohibitions to vaping device use on the school site as it does to cigarettes/tobacco products

- Apply to the whole school community (for example staff, visitors and contractors as well as learners)

- Apply to the whole of the school grounds (for example car parks and other outdoor spaces)

- Apply to all school-related activity (e.g. school trips or events)

- Apply to the school premises outside of school hours (for example when being used by the community for after hours events)

- Include the permanent confiscation of prohibited items. This should apply to vaping devices as well as to cigarettes

- Include clear processes for reporting known sources of illegal tobacco/vapes

- Be clear about the involvement of other agencies

- Identify sources of support for young people experiencing signs of nicotine dependency

- Be developed with learners, staff and the wider school community

- Be effectively communicated to everyone it affects so that they are aware of the content

- Include asking people not to vape directly outside your school grounds.

b. Behavioural policies and practices

Addressing the behaviours associated with vaping through effective and consistently applied behaviour management should be undertaken in line with your school's behaviour management practice. Addressing these behaviours effectively requires understanding of the patterns of vaping across the community of learners.

Questions to consider are:

- What do you understand about the patterns of behaviour across the school learner community and how can this inform prevention and management? For example:
  - Is this a lone or social phenomenon?
  - Have you identified specific locations associated with the behaviour?
  - Are behaviours more likely to occur during certain times of day or lessons?
  - Which year groups are affected?
  - Are these behaviours one off/vaping specific or part of a wider pattern of behaviours?
- How can understanding of the above inform prevention and behaviour management?
- What is your behaviour management practice around truancy?
  - Is the root cause of truancy understood and addressed?
  - Is behavioural management practice consistently applied when truancy involves vaping?

- What is your behavioural management practice around prohibited items being brought to school?
  - Are these consistently applied to vaping devices?

Key Action 5. Communicate with your school community

Clear communication with your whole school community will support your whole school approach to smoking and vaping.

Communications should:

- Clearly set out the school's position on vaping and vaping devices within the school premises

- Explain the rationale behind the school's position; this is an opportunity to help parents, carers and families to:

  - Understand that children and young people should not be vaping and that there are risks associated with underage vaping

  - Know the minimum age for sale and supply of vaping devices. Particularly that selling or supplying vaping devices to under 18s is illegal, including parents/carers or older siblings buying vaping devices for a person under 18 as well as peer-to-peer sales

  - Understand that smoking remains a significant health risk to those who smoke and those who are exposed to smoking and the support available to all to quit.

Key Action 6. Provide a call to action to the school community

Children and young people should, by law, not have access to vaping devices and so vaping amongst this age group indicates illegal supply within the local community.

When communicating with your school community, empower them to take an active stance against the illegal tobacco and vaping industry and illegal activity within their community by reporting sources of illegal sales to 'No Ifs. No Butts.'.

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Key Action 7. Participate in Programmes/Networks and access sources of support

The Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme and the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

Whole school approaches to health and wellbeing are effective in meeting the needs of your learners and community across a range of health and wellbeing outcomes and can have a positive impact on educational achievement. Further, evidence shows that embedding the core components of a whole school approach (for example, learner participation and school connectivity) can have a positive effect across multiple outcomes, particularly counter school behaviours such as vape use, tobacco use and alcohol or substance use[11]. The relationship between mental health and vape use amongst young people has already been examined within this document and highlights the interrelated nature of physical and emotional and mental wellbeing.

Your local healthy schools team and local implementation co-ordinators can support you to embed the core components of a whole school approach alongside a whole school approach to your priority health and wellbeing issues. This includes a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing in line with the statutory framework.

Local teams can support your school in understanding need and identifying priorities, self-evaluating progress and developing action plans, reviewing policies, signposting/facilitating access to expertise, training and resources and networking and learning from other schools in Wales.

Contact your linked co-ordinator or local team for support.

Cynlluniau Ysgolion Iach - Rhwydwaith Cymru
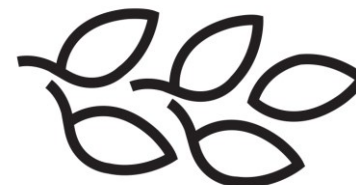
Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes

JUSTB Smoke Free

JUSTB Smoke Free is an evidence-based smoking prevention intervention developed and delivered to schools in Wales by Public Health Wales. It is a peer-led programme delivered to peer-identified, influential year 8 (12-13 year old) learners. It equips these young people with the knowledge, skills and motivation to comfortably discuss the risks of smoking and the benefits of being smoke free amongst their peers, prior to the age of typical smoking initiation. A member of the school staff also attends the programme and so this also provides an opportunity to experience prevention education in action.

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Eligibility for the JUSTB Smoke Free programme is determined by smoking prevalence levels amongst young people in the local area. All schools that meet the eligibility criteria for JUSTB Smoke Free are strongly encouraged to participate in this evidence-based intervention.

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School Nursing Service

School Nursing services are currently supporting schools across Wales to manage and respond to vaping amongst learners in individual school settings. This includes providing support to schools that have raised concerns or have asked for advice.

Where there are drop-ins available at schools, school nurses are able to provide advice and support to learners. Please contact your local school nursing service for further information on the types of support offered.

Key Action 8. Support young people to stop vaping

Learners who are identified as current or recent users of vapes may have very different reasons for vaping and experiences of use. At an individual level it is important to understand these to provide effective and appropriate support.

Questions to consider are:

- Is the learner a regular vaper or have they only tried vaping once or twice?

- How long has the learner been vaping?

- Is the learner using other substances, or engaging in other risky behaviours, or is vaping the only concern?

- Is the learner vaping within a wider social network of learners or do they usually vape alone?

- Does the learner vape in other settings, e.g. outside school grounds or in the family home?

- Where does the learner obtain their vapes from and how are these paid for? Be alert to potential supply networks within the school setting and/or association with other potential safeguarding concerns

- What are the learner's wider needs? Do they receive or need support for other social or educational issues?

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Each learner who is a current or recent user of vapes will have individual needs. However, it may be useful to consider three broad categories of vaping experience when considering what individual support is to be offered:

Experimentation

- Learners who have tried vaping once but have not progressed to regular use
- Opportunity to discuss motivations for experimentation (e.g. curiosity, peer pressure) and support learners to manage any unwanted pressures.

Regular use perceived as controlled

- Learners who vape regularly but do not believe this is affecting their lives negatively and/or they are not dependent
- Understand contexts of use (e.g. is there vaping in the family home?)
- Explore reasons for vaping (e.g. do they perceive vaping as helping to manage stress) and any unacknowledged negative experiences
- Explore the issue of the cost of and access to vapes; how much it costs to vape regularly and risks associated with underage access
- Encourage consideration of options for harm reduction and/or cessation.

Dependent vaping identified as a problem

- Learners who recognise they are dependent on vaping and that vaping negatively affecting their lives
- Identify specific issues related to vaping and issues/needs that might be connected to use
- Discuss options for support, including referral to appropriate services (e.g. school nursing within Key Action 7 or Help Me Quit – see below for further information).

Support for young people who may wish to quit vaping

Public Health Wales is currently leading a project to understand what works best to support both adults and children and young people to quit vaping. This will identify the most effective services and interventions for vaping cessation in Wales.

Whilst this work is being completed, vape users who would like support to quit should be signposted to the national Help Me Quit helpline where they will be offered free, specialist NHS advice and advised of any additional support that may be available in their area.

Call 0800 085 2219, Text HMQ to 80818 or visit www.helpmequit.wales.

HELPA FI I STOPIO - HELP ME QUIT

Key Action 9. Keep learning and building your own and others' knowledge

Knowledge, data and understanding of vaping behaviours amongst children and young people, including effective measures to reduce the risk of potential harm to children and young people is still emerging as we learn more about:

- Trends in smoking and vaping behaviours amongst the children, young people and adults in Wales

- The impact of population measures (such as regulation) on trends in use

- Long term impacts (health and otherwise) of vaping behaviours

- Effective learner, school and system level interventions to prevent and respond to vaping amongst children and young people.

We recommend sharing experiences within your local networks and keeping up to date with knowledge and guidance as the area develops. In particular, to participate in the School Health Research Network (see Key Action 10).

Key Action 10. Participate in School Health Research Network

Continue to participate in the SHRN school surveys (learner and school environment questionnaires) to help build a local and national picture of smoking and vaping behaviours and responses and how these are changing over time. This critical source of intelligence enables Wales to take the best collective action to promote and support children and young people's health and wellbeing.

Access SHRN webinars to hear the most recent research findings based on SHRN data and wider research conducted by members of the School Health Research Network.

Suggested curriculum learning

Key concept 1

What it means to be healthy – what are the personal health impacts of vaping?

Suggested learning

- Examining 'what helps me to be healthy' through the lens of being free from addiction. This could include the physical, psychological and social implications of addictions

- Introducing vaping and vaping devices as psycho-active substances with harmful health effects including health implications of nicotine and other toxins. This could include a specific focus on the impact of nicotine on the developing brain

- Understanding the knowns and unknowns about vaping (for example whilst there is consensus that vaping is less harmful than smoking, the long-term risks of vaping are unclear)

- Exploring how vaping represents a new health harm to non-smoking populations (e.g. young people) and is not a safe alternative to smoking whilst also being a potentially helpful tool in supporting **existing adult smokers** to quit smoking.

Links to Statements of What Matters

Health and Wellbeing: Developing physical health has lifelong benefits (health promoting and health harming behaviours).

Health and Wellbeing: Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others (assessing risk).

Science and Technology: The world around us is full of living things which depend on each other for survival (an understanding of the factors which affect health allows us to make informed decisions about our physical health, including about prevention and treatment of diseases).

| What are vaping devices? | How many young people are using vaping devices and why are they vaping? | Why is there concern about vaping amongst young people? | What is the law relating to vapes and vaping in Wales? | Why are we concerned about illegal/illicit vaping devices and vaping products? | How can schools respond to and address vaping amongst young people? | Suggested curriculum learning | Sources of further information |

Key concept 2

How vaping is presented and viewed in our society – why do people vape?

Suggested learning

The social context

- Critically examining the relative harms and potential benefits of vaping for different groups of people and society (e.g. children and young people, current adult smokers and non-smokers). Questions to ask:

  - What is the evidence around vaping?

  - What are the knowns and unknowns? e.g. how does vaping affect physical, mental and emotional health over the long term?

  - Where are the trusted sources of information (and critically discussing how young people might assess the credibility of sources of information)?

- This approach could be extended to examine the relative harms and benefits of disposable vapes from a health and environmental perspective (see below)

- Critically examining young people's motivation to start vaping and the influences that shape this, including peers, family, community, media, industry and misinformation. Questions to consider:

  - What are the possible drivers to vaping? E.g. peer influence, curiosity, social media, belief that vaping can reduce stress/support mental wellbeing

  - Are there alternative ways to meet these drivers? How do they compare (health, effectiveness, cost)? E.g. exercise, being outdoors, listening to music

  - Are influences fully informed and fully informing?

- Identifying (using local and national SHRN data) that the social norm amongst children and young people is non-use of vapes and tobacco products (as well as other psycho-active substances)

- Exploring adolescent decision-making within the context of adolescent brain development

- Examining sources of information available to young people about vaping and critically discussing the credibility of sources.

The legal and regulatory context

- Examining the role of regulation and law (including age restrictions), its purpose and how it impacts on decision-making. Questions to explore:

  - Why are some substances/products illegal, age-restricted or heavily regulated? E.g. to control the amount of nicotine available, to ban specific substances, to control who has access?

  - Which regulations and laws govern the content and sale of vapes? What does this mean for young people under 18? What does this mean for people supplying young people under 18?

- Does the legal status of products/substances help you and others make decisions about what is 'safe' and what might be 'harmful'?

- Does regulation help you and others make decisions about what is 'safe' and what might be 'harmful'?

- Exploring how the government, regulators and industry can collectively take action to reduce the access and appeal of vaping to children and young people, including by restricting the sale and marketing of vapes to this group.

The industry and commercial context

- Examining the role of marketing, advertising and availability of substances/products on exposure and consumption. Questions to explore:

  - Why are vaping devices and products sold in flavours that are likely to appeal to children and young people?

  - Why are vaping devices and products sold in bright colours that are likely to appeal to children and young people?

  - What product placement techniques do the vaping industry use to promote their products (for example social media/influencers)? Are there similarities with the tobacco industry now or historically? What does their approach tell you about their target audiences?

  - What thoughts, feelings and emotions are advertisers and marketeers trying to elicit in response to their products? Are these realistic? What are they not telling you?

- What are the differences in advertising regulation of tobacco and vaping devices? What impact does this have on your/young people's exposure to vaping and messages about vaping?

- What are the links between tobacco companies and vape companies? (you could use the example of electric vehicle manufacturers here which are largely the same companies that produce petrol/diesel vehicles but they expand/adapt to their audience's needs in order to maintain their business).

Links to Statements of What Matters

Health and Wellbeing: Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others (factors that influence decision, critical thinking skills).

Health and Wellbeing: How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and wellbeing (critically examining social influences, exploring social norms, examining social values).

Health and Wellbeing: How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional wellbeing (examining connections between experiences and emotions).

Science and Technology: Being curious and searching for answers is essential to understanding and predicting phenomena (evaluate scientific claims to help make informed decisions that affect our environment and wellbeing).

Humanities: Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity, and are able to take considered and ethical action (encouraging learners to be active, informed and responsible citizens and consumers who identify with and contribute to their communities).

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Key concept 3

The wider societal and environmental impacts of vaping – what are the wider impacts of vaping for communities, Wales and our environment?

Suggested learning

Societal impact of vaping

- Examining the illegal tobacco and vape trade and its relationship with societal harms including:

  - Illegal vape/tobacco trade links to organised crime

  - Young people's exposure to illegal trade increases exposure to criminal activity and criminal groups

  - Lack of regulation of the content of illegal vaping devices (and thus greater potential for health harms)

  - Greater health inequalities (as illegal trade targets those with less material resource)

  - Reduced tax revenue to fund prevention of harms and other social good/public services

- Examining the role learners and the community can take in tackling the illegal supply and sale of vapes through reporting illegal activity to 'No Ifs. No Butts.'.

The environmental impacts of vaping

- Examining the environmental impact of vaping – particularly use of disposable vaping devices:

  - Vaping devices contain metals and plastics which can take many years to decompose. The use of disposable vaping devices and products has increased substantially amongst young people, with 69% of current vapers using disposable vaping devices in 2023 compared with 7.7% in 2021[5]

  - Rather than decomposing, plastic turns into "microplastics" which continue to pollute the environment, our food and drinking water

  - Disposable vaping devices also contain lithium batteries which, if damaged, can pose a fire hazard when thrown away

  - Lithium is also a very valuable metal but tonnes of it each year is being thrown away and ends up in landfill or waste incinerators. This lithium could be used in things like electric cars which could help us address climate change

  - Disposable vaping devices are classed as Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and should be being recycled

  - Explore safe disposal of disposable vaping devices and other electrical equipment via recycling schemes. You can find your closest centre on the Recycle Your Electricals website.

Links to Statements of What Matters

Health and Wellbeing: Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others (critical thinking skills to inform decision-making, collective action).

Humanities: Our natural world is diverse and dynamic, influenced by processes and human actions (encouraging learners to understand, as producers and consumers, their own impact on the natural world).

Humanities: Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity and are able to take considered and ethical action (encouraging learners to be active, informed and responsible citizens and consumers who identify with and contribute to their communities).

Sources of further information

National Survey for Wales: https://www.gov.wales/national-survey-wales

School Health Research Network (SHRN) Dashboard: https://publichealthwales.shinyapps.io/SHRN_Dashboard/

School Health Research Network: https://www.shrn.org.uk/

ASH Wales: https://ash.wales/

World Health Organisation (WHO): https://www.who.int/news/item/27-07-2021-who-reports-progress-in-the-fight-against-tobacco-epidemic

No Ifs. No Butts.: https://noifs-nobutts.co.uk/

Help Me Quit: https://www.helpmequit.wales

Childline: https://www.childline.org.uk/

Meic Cymru: https://www.meiccymru.org/

Talk to Frank: https://www.talktofrank.com

Dan 24/7: https://dan247.org.uk/

NHS 111 Wales – PRESS 2: https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/m/article/mentalhealthandwellbeing?locale=en&term=A

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