

Youth vaping: Advice and guidance for schools

This guidance has been written by Dudley Council's Public Health & Wellbeing team with support from partners, to help schools respond to growing concerns about the number of young people vaping.

What is vaping?

Vaping describes the use of a vape which delivers an inhalable aerosol by heating a solution that typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol and/or vegetable glycerine, distilled water, plus flavourings. Unlike cigarettes, vapes do not burn and therefore no smoke or other harmful products of combustion, such as tar and carbon monoxide are produced. Vapes are significantly less harmful than tobacco and the evidence shows they are the most successful product in helping people to quit smoking. However, vapes are not recommended for use by children and young people under the age of 18, or anyone who has never smoked.

Vapes were more commonly known as e-cigarettes, however, as there are so many different devices which do not resemble a cigarette, they are now referred to as vapes or vaping devices.

The evidence on vaping

The most robust evidence on the health risks of nicotine vaping is contained within the [Nicotine Vaping in England: 2022 evidence update](#). It concludes that vaping poses only a small fraction of the risk of smoking. It also suggests that vapes deliver fewer cancer-causing carcinogens, oxidants and toxins than tobacco, and contain much lower levels of toxic emissions, compared to the many harmful chemicals found in cigarette smoke. However, as they have only been around for quite a short amount of time, we do not know the long-term effects of vaping and there are concerns that young people choosing to vape may become nicotine dependent. Therefore, vapes are not recommended for use by children and young people, or anyone who has never smoked.

The popularity of vaping among young people in the UK

The latest figures published by [Action on Smoking and Health](#) (ASH) in May 2023, showed that:

- in 2023 20.5% of children had tried vaping, up from 15.8% in 2022. The majority had only vaped once or twice (11.6%), while 7.6% were currently vaping (3.9% less than once a week, 3.6% more than once a week) and the remainder (1.3% in 2023) saying they no longer vape;
- since 2021 the proportion of current vaping has been greater than that of current smoking (7.6% compared to 3.6% in 2023);
- there is an age gradient both for 'ever' and 'current' vaping. Among 11-15 year olds 15% have tried vaping, compared to 34% of 16-17 year olds. The figures for current use are 4.6% among those aged 11-15 and 15% for 16-17 year-olds.

Although this trend is concerning, it's important to acknowledge that 92.4% of 11 – 17-year-olds do not regularly vape and just under 80% have never tried a vape.



National guidance on youth vaping

ASH has produced a [briefing for local authorities](#) to respond to the recent increase in young people choosing to vape. Although it is primarily for public health and trading standards officers, it also sets out important information for councillors, education settings, parents and retailers.

Access to vapes

The latest [report](#) from ASH states that nearly three quarters of young people that have tried vaping say their first vape was given to them (two-thirds by a friend), but for those who regularly vape, nearly three-quarters say they usually buy their vapes and most commonly from a corner shop (26%). Students that are caught vaping at school or in possession of vaping products should be asked where they got their vapes from so that appropriate action can be taken.

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) has [voiced concerns](#) about emerging evidence suggesting a potential link between underage vaping and the risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Several regions across England and Wales report that vapes have been supplied to underage children by shops and other businesses to groom them for CSE purposes.

If there are concerns that the supply of vapes could be the result of an improper relationship with the student, the Police should be informed, along with Safeguarding, following the school's standard escalation processes.

Underage sales and advertising

Vapes and vaping products containing nicotine are age restricted. It is illegal to sell them to under 18s, and for adults to buy them on their behalf, this includes parents and carers. Enforcement of laws on underage sales, sales of illegal products, and point of sale advertising are the responsibility of Trading Standards. Reporting of underage sales in the Dudley borough should be made to Dudley Council's [Trading Standards Team](#) on 01384 814600 or email trading.standards@dudley.gov.uk. Alternatively complete an [online reporting form](#), which can be submitted anonymously.

Complaints about all other inappropriate advertising and promotion of vaping to under-18s, for example on social media such as Tik Tok or Instagram, should be made to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) through the [online complaints portal](#).

Illegal or counterfeit vapes

In the UK all vape products are regulated so must comply with Tobacco and Related Products Regulation laws and quality and safety standards, including a limit on nicotine content, additives and tank size. Compliant vape devices will have a maximum tank size of 2ml, and the highest nicotine strength will be 20mg/ml or 2%. However, some illegal vapes have tank sizes up to seven times the legal limit and some have been found to contain as much as 50mg of nicotine. If a vape claims to have over 600 puffs, it's also likely to be illegal. There is no guarantee that illegal vapes are safe and the e-liquid could contain harmful additives that have been banned in the UK and therefore are not regulated for use.

It's important to note that the majority of illegal vapes seized in Dudley have so far been disposable vapes. Illegal disposable vapes often lack quality due to cheaper manufacturing costs and the packaging may look substandard.



The illegal devices tend to have missing information, like health warnings, batch details and hazard warnings. The main things to look out for when checking disposable vape products are tank size and nicotine strength.

	UK Standard Compliant Maximum Levels
Tank Size	2ml
Nicotine strength	20mg/ml or 2%
Number of puffs	600

The only way someone can confidently buy legal vape products is to purchase them from a reputable seller, such as a specialist vape shop, pharmacy, or supermarket. However, as they are an age-restricted product, it is less likely under-18s will be buying vapes from these retailers. This could increase the chance of them buying illegal vapes through other sources. Where vape devices are confiscated at school, students should be encouraged to disclose where they got it from.

If you suspect a retailer is selling illegal vapes, they should be reported to Dudley Council's Trading Standards Team on 01384 814600 or email trading.standards@dudley.gov.uk. Alternatively complete an [online reporting form](#), which can be submitted anonymously.

Managing behaviour related to vapes and vaping

The following guidance is taken from [ADPH South East: Managing Vapes in Schools](#).

Schools may need to tackle behaviours related to vaping, which might include:

- A child vaping in school or on the school site
- A child with vapes in their possession at school
- 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 or carer

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 for vaping/smoking or substance use or incorporated into the overall [behaviour policy](#).

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.

It is important that schools adopt a proportionate response to exclusion and punishment. Action on Smoking and Health has developed specific [guidance for schools](#) on developing policies on vaping, which is relevant for staff Designated Safeguarding Leads, Relationship, Sex & Health Education Leads and Senior Leadership Teams.



Whole school policy

A whole school policy on vaping should cover the following areas and be reviewed regularly.

Aim of the policy and who it applies to	Include what the policy is trying to achieve and who it applies to in the school community (e.g. students, staff, visitors). Any evidence or data that is included must be both up-to-date and accurate.
Links with other school policies	This should include how this policy links with other policies within the school, such as the Safeguarding Policy, Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) Policy or Behaviour Policy. You may also choose to include the school's policy on vaping within a wider Drugs, Tobacco and Alcohol Use Policy.
Staff	Include the name of the staff member with the lead responsibility for a whole school approach to Drugs, Tobacco and Alcohol Use, including vaping. Outline any relevant staff training/CPD needs and how these will be met.
Curriculum	Describe how education on vaping is included within the drugs, alcohol and tobacco education taught in school, as part of the RSHE curriculum. This should be part of a whole school programme of study, delivered within a spiral RSHE curriculum, which is appropriate to age and experience.
School ethos, culture and values	Explain how the policy supports the school's ethos, culture and values, for example around sustainability and the environment, the health and safety of the school community and the pastoral needs of students.
School's policy/rules	Outline the school's rules and expectations on vaping for both students and staff.
Managing incidents	Outline the action that the school will take if a student or staff member breaches the rules on vaping. It is important to acknowledge that although it is illegal to sell vapes to under-18s, it is not illegal to vape underage and punishment should therefore be proportionate. Students should not be excluded from school for vaping or smoking, unless it is associated with other disruptive behaviour which justifies this. Outline the procedures that should be followed where there are safeguarding concerns or provide a link to the school's safeguarding policy.
Support services and signposting	Outline the local support services available for students and staff that vape (or smoke) and want to quit (see page 6). Outline sources of support that students can be signposted to for more information about vaping, such as Talk to Frank https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/vapes
The wider school community	Outline how staff, governors, students and parent/carers will be made aware of the school's policy on vaping. Include details about how the school engages with parent/carers and staff on the issue of vaping.

If schools require further guidance on developing a school policy on vaping or a wider drug, tobacco and alcohol use policy, they can contact Dudley's Young Person's Wellbeing & Substance Use Service, Here4YOUth here4youth@cranstoun.org.uk for support and advice.



Teaching resources

Schools have a statutory duty to deliver [health education](#) on drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. There are a number of teaching resources available to support schools with the delivery of health education lessons on vaping.

1. The [PSHE Association](#) has developed a [Year 9 lesson](#) exploring the consequences of vaping and challenging the influences that might encourage young people to vape. This resource is also available to non-members.
2. The [INTENT: Smoking Prevention Programme](#) works by targeting young people who have never smoked. INTENT reduces smoking initiation by first getting adolescents to engage with anti-smoking messages and then creating Personal Plans (or “Implementation Intentions”) about how to refuse an offer of cigarettes. The principles of this approach can also be applied to vaping.
3. [Life-stuff.org](#) has produced a new section on its advice hub for 16-25 year olds around the topic of vaping. This page covers a range of information including how vaping differs from smoking, CBD and cannabis vapes, what is in vape liquid and how to spot a legal vape.
4. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has developed a range of teaching resources and lesson plans on vaping for year 7 and 8 students. These can be found on the [Campaign Resource Centre](#), which is the digital platform for government health improvement campaigns and resources.
5. [Smoke Free Sheffield](#) has produced a range of free resources to support schools teach students about the facts of vaping.

[Vaping: The Facts. Poster 1](#)

[Vaping: The Facts Poster 2](#)

[Vaping The Facts: Teachers Toolkit](#)

[Vaping: The Facts. Animation Video](#)

[Vaping: The Facts: Classroom Presentation](#)

[Vaping: The Facts: Classroom Presentation Notes Page](#)

Engaging with parents

Dudley Council and partners have produced a set of Frequently Asked Questions to support parents and carers to have a conversation with their children about vaping. Schools are encouraged to share this resource with parents and carers as part of their engagement work on this issue.

The Parent FAQs can be downloaded [here](#).



Schools should also be aware that some parents and carers may be smokers, with many making positive steps to 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](#)

[Using e-cigarettes to stop smoking - NHS](#)

[Dudley Quit Smoking Service](#)



Stop vaping (or smoking) services for young people in Dudley

Young people aged 12+ that want to quit vaping or smoking should be referred to their school nurse for support. Alternatively, young people that do not have access to a school nurse can receive support from Dudley's Young Person's Wellbeing & Substance Use Service, [Here4YOUth](#).

Service	Age criteria	Contact details
School Nurse	12 – 16 years* <small>*Up to 18 if a young person attends a sixth form at a school</small>	All schools in Dudley have access to a designated school nurse dihc.dudleyadminteam@nhs.net 01384 408990
Here4YOUth	12 – 18 years	here4youth@cranstoun.org.uk 01384 241 440 http://www.cranstoun.org/help-and-advice/young-people/here4youth-dudley

If you have any questions about the information contained within this guidance, please contact Dudley Public Health's Children & Young People's Team cypeteam@dudley.gov.uk

