



Association of Directors of Public Health North East Position Statement on Nicotine Vaping September 2023

The Association of Directors of Public Health North East (ADPHNE) is the North East regional arm of the representative body for Directors of Public Health in the UK. This position statement on nicotine vaping should be read in conjunction with the [ASH briefings and guidance for local authorities and schools](#), the [ADPH position statement on tobacco, the North East and North Cumbria Smokefree NHS/Treating Tobacco Dependency Taskforce position statement](#) and the ADPHNE and Fresh Vaping Communications Guide. It has been developed following publication of the [Nicotine vaping in England 2022 evidence update](#), the latest in a series of robust systematic reviews commissioned by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. This statement updates the previous ADPHNE position statement from November 2022 to reflect our continued position that vapes have an important role in tobacco control strategies but that they are not risk-free and are not for children. This updated statement also clarifies our position on the regulations we believe are needed for vapes.

Please note that for the purposes of this document, any references to vapes, vaping or e-cigarettes relate to nicotine-containing vapes, nicotine vaping and nicotine-containing e-cigarettes that comply with UK regulations unless otherwise stated.

Our position on nicotine vaping

- Smoking tobacco will kill up to 2 out of 3 long term users. Tobacco remains the single biggest cause of preventable illness and death with approximately 5,000 people in the North East dying each year from smoking. Smoking costs the North East economy over £992 million a year in healthcare, social care, lost earnings and other costs and is a significant driver of health inequalities. Our priority for tobacco control must be to reduce the number of people who smoke a known uniquely lethal product. We are committed to our shared ambition to reduce smoking rates to 5% or less by 2030.
- For smokers, vaping is a far less risky option and, in the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking. Though it is not risk-free and is not for children, we must ensure that vaping is an affordable and accessible alternative for smokers who want to reduce their risk of dying from a smoking-related disease. Figures from a survey in the North East in Spring 2023 show that adults who vape but still smoke are around twice as likely to want to quit smoking and twice as likely to be trying to cut down or quit. A critical recommendation to the government from Dr Javed Khan OBE's independent review on making smoking obsolete is to promote vaping as an effective tool to help adults quit smoking tobacco and that vaping can play an important role in an effective tobacco control strategy.
- Exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke is dangerous. In households where tobacco smoking occurs, vaping instead of smoking offers a less harmful alternative. Compared with cigarettes, vaping products produce no or little side-stream emissions. The OHID-commissioned evidence update found that there is no significant increase of toxicant biomarkers after short-term secondhand exposure to vaping among people who do not smoke or vape.

- At the same time, we recognise that vaping is not risk-free and therefore vaping must be presented as a replacement for smoking for those who already smoke, not something which is appealing to young people or the wider non-smoking population. Whilst it can help adults quit smoking, we need to reduce the number of young people accessing vape products and the amount of non-compliant products available for sale. We need to work closely with our Trading Standards colleagues to support compliance with regulations and to take enforcement action when necessary.
- It is concerning that too many smokers inaccurately believe that vaping is equally as, or more harmful than, smoking. We therefore support the delivery of evidence based communications among stakeholders and the public to widen understanding and to ensure smokers understand that switching to vaping is a significantly less harmful option than continuing to smoke. A useful myth-buster from ASH can be found [here](#) which aids the responsible reporting of the evidence about vaping, alongside the vaping communications guide from ADPHNE and Fresh.
- To reduce youth vaping prevalence while supporting adults to quit, we recommend the Government implements the four high impact interventions proposed by ASH:
 1. Making disposable vapes less affordable and accessible: with a £5 excise tax, strengthening the powers of Border Force and HMRC to stop the illegal disposables from entering the UK.
 2. Motivate adult smokers to quit using heavy weight anti-smoking public health campaigns which promote vaping to adult smokers as a quitting aid
 3. Putting vapes out of sight and out of reach of children: by prohibiting promotion of e-cigarettes in shops, limiting where they can be sold.
 4. Putting vapes in plain packaging to make them less appealing to children: prohibiting sweet names, bright colours, and cartoon characters.
- While some organisations are calling for a ban on disposable vapes, the position of the ADPHNE, the Smokefree NHS/Treating Tobacco Dependency Taskforce and Fresh is that we need to keep monitoring the evidence and at this stage, we are not recommending a ban. There could be too many unintended consequences following the introduction of a ban and there are other regulatory options which we believe need to be explored first. From a health perspective, we know single use vapes are really important for some priority groups e.g. those with serious mental illness or older people who would benefit from a simple, easy to use alternative form of nicotine delivery. A paper on policy options for disposables from ASH, Chartered Trading Standards Institute and Material Focus can be found [here](#).
- As with many single use products, we note there are concerns about the environmental aspect of disposable vapes that need to be addressed urgently. Vape companies are currently not complying with their environmental obligations and we support the recommendations of Material Focus who are calling for a revision of regulations. We want to ensure that the full environmental costs of collecting and recycling vapes are met by industry and not by public finances. Those importing and selling vapes in the UK must be required to cover the costs of recycling schemes, the promotion of those schemes to consumers and held responsible for the level of recycling undertaken. More detail can be found in the policy options paper linked above. We also need action to address the negative impact on the environment caused by discarded tobacco products and in particular cigarette butts which are the most littered item worldwide and which can't be recycled, do not biodegrade and which leach toxic chemicals into the environment.

- We note questions have been raised about the potential role of flavours in appealing to children and this is an area where urgent research is needed in order to establish the most appropriate policy response, such as limiting the amount of flavours or flavour components that are available. We are not recommending a ban on flavours themselves at this current time, recognising that flavours play an important role in improving the quitting experience for adults and that the risk of adverse unintended consequences is too great. However, the Government must explore options to limit the appeal of flavours to children by regulating the ways in which vape products are named, described and portrayed.

The problem with tobacco smoking

Tobacco smoking is the leading cause of preventable mortality and a key contributor to avoidable health inequalities. Cigarettes are the only legal consumer product that, when used exactly as the manufacturer intends them to be used, will kill up to two thirds of long term consumers. Tobacco and vapes both contain nicotine which is an addictive substance, but nicotine itself has been used safely for many years in medicines to help people stop smoking. However, tobacco and the smoke it produces contains a toxic mix of thousands of chemicals, many of which are known to cause cancer as well as other fatal and life limiting conditions such as respiratory and cardiovascular disease, not just among smokers but also among those who are exposed to secondhand smoke.

In 2022, 13.1% of adults in the North East smoke, down from 29% in 2005 but despite faster progress in this region than other areas, an inequalities gap remains. The smoking rate among routine and manual workers is 21.6%, resulting in a significantly negative impact on income as well as employment, due to ill health and disability. Among those with mental health conditions, the smoking rate is 27%, with smoking being a leading cause of reduced life expectancy. Smoking rates have continued to go down in recent years in the North East which is encouraging given the challenges to the region from economic pressures and the comprehensive approach being taken including a tobacco harm reduction component is important.

The evidence base on vaping

The most robust evidence on nicotine vaping is contained within the [Nicotine Vaping in England: 2022 evidence update](#). The report is the most comprehensive to date, its main focus being a systematic review of the evidence on the health risks of nicotine vaping. Based on the evidence within the review, a summary of conclusions is that:

- In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking, but that 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, as shown by biomarkers associated with the risk of cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular conditions. However, there is similar or higher exposure to harmful substances from vaping compared with not using any nicotine products.
- There is no significant increase of toxicant biomarkers after short-term secondhand exposure to vaping among people who do not smoke or vape.

The role of vaping in helping smokers to quit tobacco

The [Cochrane living systematic review on electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation](#) provides high certainty evidence that that vaping is effective at stopping people smoking. NICE recommends that smokers are encouraged to vape in their quit attempt and they are currently the most common aid used by people to help them stop. However the majority who

use them are doing so without behavioural support: quit rates will increase if behavioural support is provided alongside switching to vaping.

E-cigarette regulation

- E-cigarettes are regulated in the UK through legislation relating to quality, safety, age of sale and advertising and we must work closely with enforcement partners including Trading Standards to support compliance. However, there are significant concerns about the attractiveness of vaping to children, that many retailers are selling to under 18s and that products are being sold that don't comply with UK rules. These issues need to be looked at nationally to ensure the products available are compliant and aren't sold to children while at the same time ensuring that vapers can access devices that can support them to quit and stay quit. We support the introduction of Operation Joseph, funded by Department of Health and Social Care and delivered by Trading Standards, which aims to reduce underage sales and take action against those selling non-compliant products.
- In June 2023 we responded to the [Government's call for evidence on youth vaping](#) to urgently call for tighter regulations around pricing, branding and promotion for vapes, supporting the [four high impact actions](#) put forward by ASH. At the time of writing we await the next steps from the Government.

Footnotes:

The ADPHNE

The Association of Directors of Public Health North East (ADPHNE) is the North East regional arm of the representative body for Directors of Public Health (DsPH) in the UK. The ADPH seeks to improve and protect the health of the population and is a collaborative organisation working in partnership with others to maximise the voice for public health.

General resources

[Nicotine Vaping in England: 2022 evidence review](#)

[ASH briefing for local authorities on youth vaping](#)

ASH Smokefree GB survey data on e-cigarette use by [adults](#) and [young people](#)

[Addressing common myths about vaping – ASH briefing](#)

[APPG Smoking and Health report on Delivering a Smokefree 2030](#)

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

For smokers

[OHID Better Health pages on vaping to quit smoking](#)

[Fresh Quit](#)

For health care professionals and public health colleagues

[NENC ICB Smokefree NHS/Treating Tobacco Dependency Taskforce position statement on nicotine vaping](#)

[Cochrane living systematic review on the use of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation](#)

[NICE guidance on tobacco: preventing uptake, promoting quitting and treating dependence](#)

[Smokefree Action Coalition information on vaping during pregnancy](#)

[PHE guidance on using e-cigarettes in NHS mental health organisations](#)

For enforcement colleagues

[ASH/ADPH webinar on e-cigarette regulation and enforcement](#)

For schools

ADPHNE/Fresh resources for schools (originally developed in Sheffield) – speak to your local public health team for access

[ASH guidance for schools and colleges](#)