

# **Youth Vaping and Smoking in Aberdeenshire: Understanding Trends, Risks and Solutions**





## Executive Summary

In partnership, Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership and NHS Grampian applied a 'Whole School Approach' to gather information to address the rising concerns around young people vaping in primary and secondary education in Aberdeenshire. This work has been rolled out in 3 stages:

Stage 1, June - September 2023 - Primary and Academy school staff

Stage 2, February - May 2024 - Academy Pupils

Stage 3, March - July 2024 - Engagement with Parents, Carer's and Guardians of school age children from P5 and up attending an Aberdeenshire primary or secondary school.

This report presents the findings from these four surveys to explore perceptions, awareness and impacts of vaping and smoking amongst young people in Aberdeenshire. The surveys aimed to understand the increasing concerns about vaping and to evaluate the effectiveness of current regulations, awareness levels and the role of various stakeholders in addressing these issues.

This data will also support the development of initiatives and programs relating to tobacco/smoking and vaping, monitor and measure effectiveness of strategies, and determine which areas should take priority.

## Introduction

### Background

The rise in vaping among young people has become a growing public health concern, particularly in Scotland where the trend appears to be increasing. The latest figures from the Scottish Government's Health and Wellbeing Census 2021/22 indicate that 10.1% of 15 year olds and 4.3% of 13 year olds report using e-cigarettes regularly. This is a significant increase from the 2018 SALSUS which showed regular vaping by 15 year olds at 3% and 13 year olds at 2%. For Aberdeenshire, 15% of 13 year olds surveyed in 2018 reported trying or using vapes, with 34% of 15 year olds trying or using vapes.

In 2022, the Scottish Health Survey reported that 10% of the population vaped, an increase from 7% the previous 5 years. Between 2019 and 2022, e-cigarette use among young adults aged 16-24 tripled from 5% to 15%.

In 2022, almost 26 million disposable vapes were consumed and thrown away in Scotland, of which an estimated 10% were littered and more than half were incorrectly disposed of. With millions of vapes littered every year, there is a significant and increasing cost to local authorities through litter clear up and waste management. Where vapes are incorrectly disposed of, the batteries increase risk of fires. The Scottish Government commissioned Zero Waste Scotland to carry out a review of the environmental impact of single use vapes and potential policy options for addressing the problems that they cause. The review estimated that there were 543,000 vapers in Scotland in 2022 - of which 51,000 (9%) were under 16 and 78,000 (14%) were under 18. Most under 18 e-cigarette users prefer to use single-use vapes.

A ban on the sale and supply of single-use vapes in Scotland is due to come into effect on 1 April 2025. The move takes forward the recommendation to ban single use vapes from a consultation on 'Creating a Smokefree Generation and Tackling Youth Vaping', which ran across the four nations in 2023. The UK-wide legislation will gradually increase the age of sale, making it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. This means that children born on or after this date (those turning 15 in 2024 and younger) will never be able to buy cigarettes. The Bill also includes new powers to regulate displays, contents, flavours and retail packaging of vapes and nicotine products, allowing restrictions to target flavours marketed at children and to move vapes out of sight of children and away from products like sweets.

Vaping, often perceived as a safer alternative to smoking, has gained popularity among teenagers, including those who have never smoked traditional cigarettes. This shift has raised alarms among teachers, parents, and health professionals, who are concerned about the long-term health impacts and the potential for vaping to serve as a gateway to smoking. Scotland has a target to reduce adult smoking prevalence from 15% in 2022 to 5% by 2034, which could be hindered by a high prevalence of vaping and smoking in our young people.

This report is based on four comprehensive surveys conducted among key stakeholders: pupils, parents, primary schools, and academies in Aberdeenshire. It captures a broad spectrum of views and insights into the prevalence of vaping and smoking, the perceptions surrounding it, and how effective current awareness and current regulatory measures are.

### Survey objectives

The main objectives of the surveys are:

1. To understand the awareness and perceptions of vaping and smoking among young people and parents
2. To evaluate the accessibility of vaping products and cigarettes to young people and the factors influencing their use
3. To assess the impact of vaping on school environments and the challenges faced by schools
4. To identify the support needs of schools and parents in addressing vaping and smoking among young people
5. To suggest recommendations for preventing and reducing vaping and smoking among young people

The surveys were distributed across various demographic groups to capture a diverse range of perspectives. The pupil's survey targeted students across different year groups, gathering data on their awareness, experiences, and views on vaping and smoking. The parent's survey aimed to understand parental concerns, awareness levels, and their ability to engage in conversations about vaping with their children. Both pupils and parents surveys were anonymous. Surveys conducted with primary schools and academies focused on the observed impact of vaping within school environments and the support needed to address this issue effectively.



## INFOGRAPHIC

### Prevalence of Vaping & Smoking

#### Regular Usage Rates

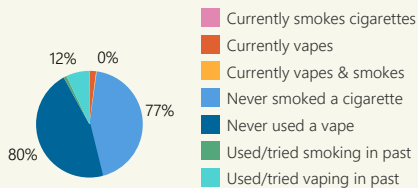
**11%** of young people regularly vape.



**9%** of young people used to vape.

**4%** of young people smoke regularly.

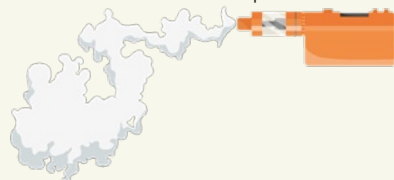
#### Parents aware whether child vapes



**3%** of parents reported their child currently vaped.

**12%** reported that their child had vaped in the past.

**2%** had smoked in the past.



### Health Risks & Awareness

**92%**

of pupils

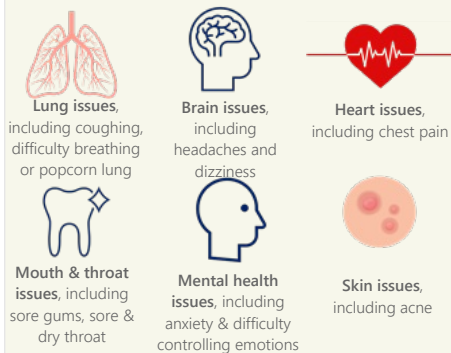


**67%**

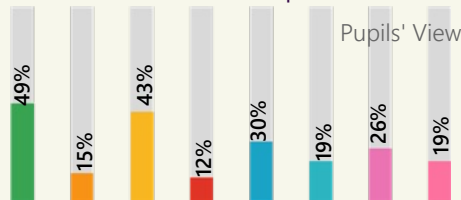
of parents

aware of potential health risks from vaping

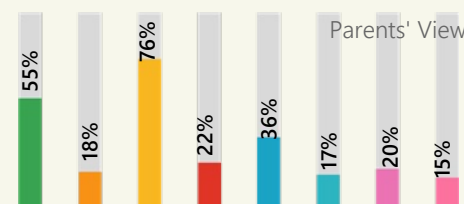
#### Most common health effects from young people vaping include



### Awareness & Perceptions



- Vapes or e-cigarettes should only be used by people wanting to quit
- Vaping is more harmful than smoking cigarettes
- Vaping is just as harmful as smoking cigarettes
- Vaping is less harmful than smoking cigarettes
- Vapes are easier to get hold of than cigarettes
- Vaping costs less than smoking cigarettes
- Vapes taste better than smoking cigarettes
- Vaping smell and look better than cigarettes
- Vaping is not addictive



#### Parents would find out if child vaped



### Regulation & Support

**90%**

of pupils



**82%**

of parents

aware of restrictions & regulations relating to purchase & use of cigarettes & vapes

**43%** of pupils know where to seek support to quit

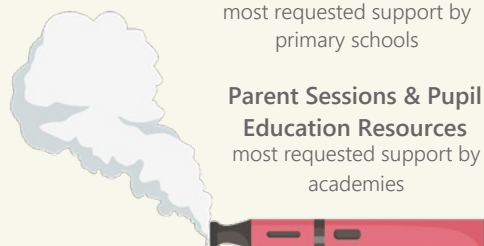


**44%** of parents know where to seek support to quit

#### Pupil Education Resources

most requested support by primary schools

**Parent Sessions & Pupil Education Resources**  
most requested support by academies



### Access & Influences

**70%**

of those who access vapes find it **easy**

**50%**

of those who access cigarettes find it **easy**



Source vapes from

**40%** friends

**13%** shop

**20%** someone

**36%** friends

**30%** family

**12%** shop

**15%** someone



Source cigarettes from



#### Influences



**41%**

I was curious



**34%**

Young people my age were vaping



**10%**

Feeling stressed



**8%**

My family were doing it



**3%**

Image & flavours of vapes

### Impact on Schools



of primary schools say vaping is having negative impact



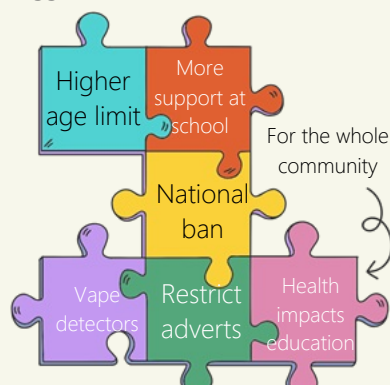
of academies say vaping is having negative impact

### Solutions & Prevention

#### Suggested Roles & Responsibilities



#### Suggested Preventative Measures



#### Impact on the school environment

is the biggest impact primary schools have with vaping



Staff time taken up with the issue

is the biggest impact academies have with vaping





## Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion

11% of pupils surveyed are vaping regularly, emphasising the urgent need to address the growing prevalence of vaping among young people in Aberdeenshire. Along with 1 in 10 young people reporting they started vaping or smoking due to stress, these figures highlight a concerning trend where both emotional and social factors are driving harmful behaviours.

The findings underscore the complexity of the vaping issue among young people in Aberdeenshire. The normalisation of vaping within social circles, combined with the ease of access and appealing marketing, presents significant challenges for public health initiatives. While there is a general awareness of the health risks, the perceived gap between personal views and peer norms indicates a need for more targeted education that addresses these misperceptions.

Whilst only 3% of pupils reported regularly smoking and vaping, with 4% of pupils reported that they smoked cigarettes regularly, this highlights a concerning trend that could hinder Scotland's national target of reducing adult smoking prevalence from 15% to 5% by 2034. The fact that these behaviours appear to increase with age suggests that smoking habits established during adolescence may persist into adulthood, contributing to the overall smoking population in the future.

Given the dual usage of vaping and smoking, there is a risk that vaping, often perceived as a less harmful alternative, could serve as a gateway to traditional cigarette smoking, especially as young people become more exposed to nicotine and potentially escalate their use. This could exacerbate the public health challenge of reducing smoking prevalence, as it not only sustains but potentially increases the population of young smokers.

Schools and parents play a pivotal role in combating this trend, yet they require more support and resources to engage effectively with young people on this topic.

The upcoming legislation banning single-use vapes and increasing the legal age for tobacco sales is likely to have a significant impact. However, the success of these measures will largely depend on their enforcement and the continued education of young people about the risks of vaping. Moreover, the role of social media and influencers in promoting vaping cannot be overlooked, suggesting that interventions must also extend into digital spaces where young people are most influenced.

Overall, this report highlights the need for a many-layered approach that combines legislative action, education, and community engagement to reduce vaping among young people. By addressing the root causes of vaping initiation and providing clear, consistent messaging about its risks, stakeholders can work together to curb this growing public health concern.

### Conclusion

The findings from the surveys conducted across Aberdeenshire reveal a significant and growing concern around vaping among young people. The data suggests that vaping has become increasingly part of growing up as young people, with early exposure to vapes often occurring within social circles, educational environments, and through various media. A considerable portion of young people, especially those in higher secondary school grades, have tried vaping, with curiosity and peer influence being the primary motivators.

Parents and school staff share substantial concerns about the health risks associated with vaping, viewing it as equally harmful as smoking traditional cigarettes. However, there appears to be a discrepancy between personal beliefs and perceived peer norms, with young people underestimating the support for non-vaping behaviours among their peers. This gap in awareness and perceptions presents a challenge in effectively addressing vaping among youth.

The accessibility of vapes is alarmingly high, particularly for older students, and is facilitated largely through social networks. This ease of access, combined with aggressive marketing and the appealing flavours of e-cigarettes, further compounds the issue, making vaping an attractive option for many young people. Despite the awareness of potential health risks, there is still a lack of detailed understanding, both among pupils and parents, about the long-term impacts of vaping.

The introduction of legislation banning single-use vapes and increasing the age of sale for tobacco products is a crucial step forward. However, the effectiveness of these measures will depend on sustained efforts to enhance awareness, support school staff and parents, and create targeted interventions that resonate with young people.