

**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

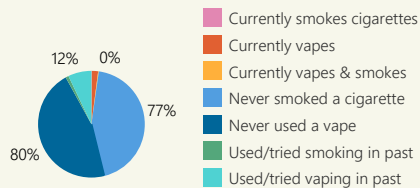
11% of young people regularly vape.



9% of young people used to vape.

4% of young people smoke regularly.

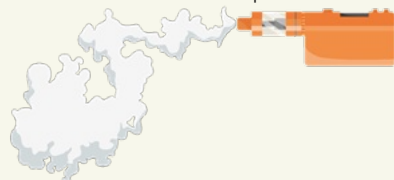
Parents aware whether child vapes



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

Lung issues, including coughing, difficulty breathing or popcorn lung

Brain issues, including headaches and dizziness

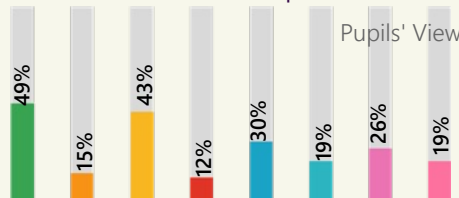
Heart issues, including chest pain

Mouth & throat issues, including sore gums, sore & dry throat

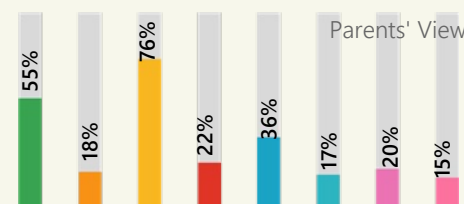
Mental health issues, including anxiety & difficulty controlling emotions

Skin issues, including acne

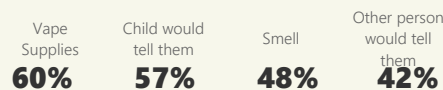
Awareness & Perceptions



- 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

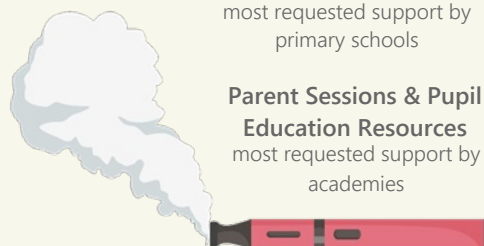


44% of parents know where to seek support to quit

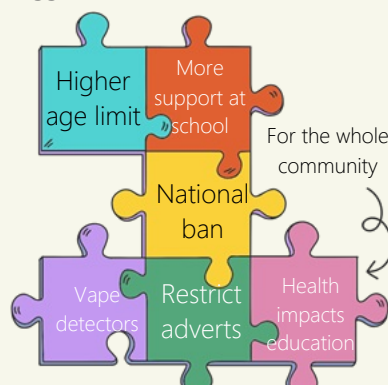
Pupil Education Resources

most requested support by primary schools

Parent Sessions & Pupil Education Resources
most requested support by academies



Suggested Preventative Measures



Access & Influences

70%

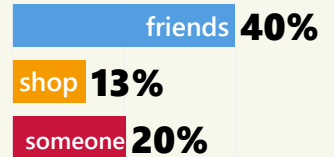
of those who access vapes find it **easy**

50%

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



Source vapes from



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



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

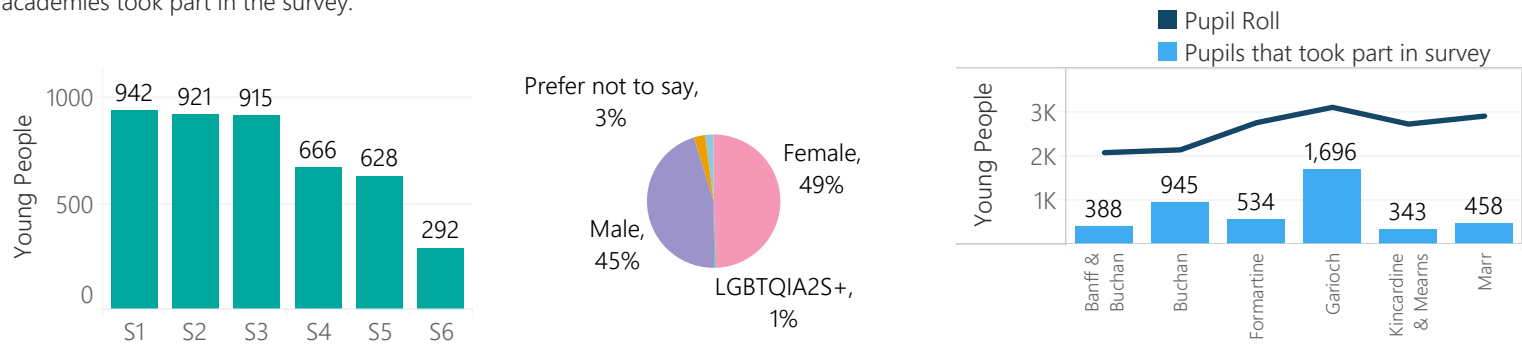


Demographics

Pupils

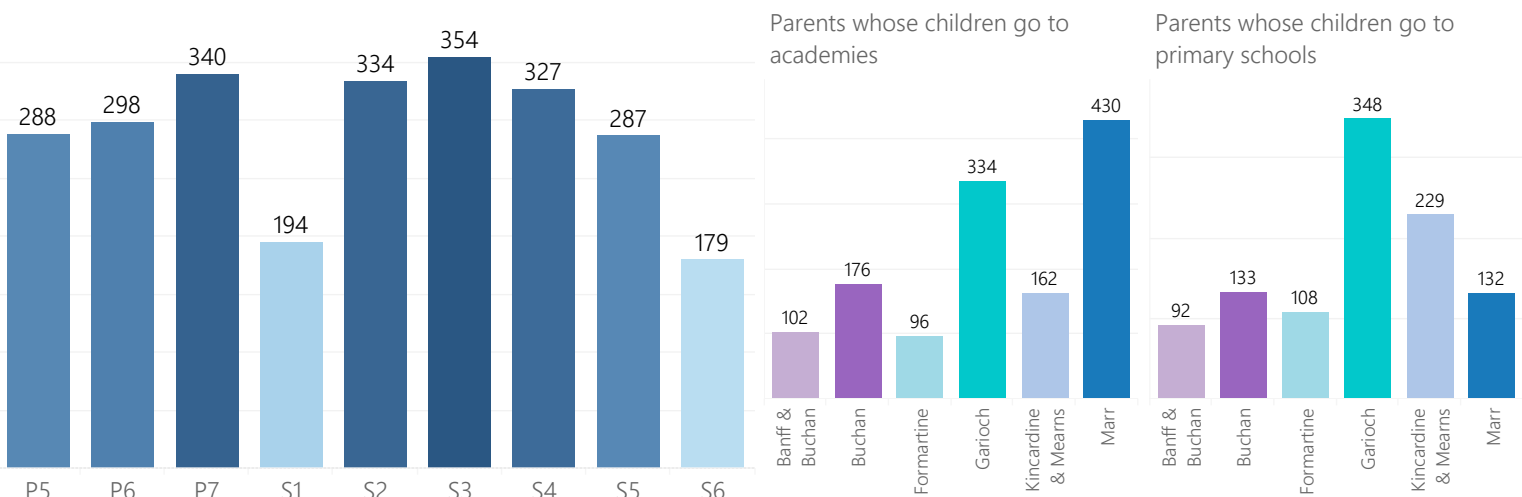
4,364 young people took part in the survey, from 14 academies.
1,979 identified as male, 2,154 identified as female. 88 are 'unknown' as the response was not a gender.

Out of a total of 15,852 pupils (based on the 2023 Pupils' Census), 27.5% of young people attending academies took part in the survey.



Parents

1,885 parents responded, whose children go to 17 academies and 108 primary schools.



Schools

107 primary schools took part, out of a total of 147.
All 17 academies in Aberdeenshire took part in the survey.

1. Awareness & Perceptions of Vaping and Smoking

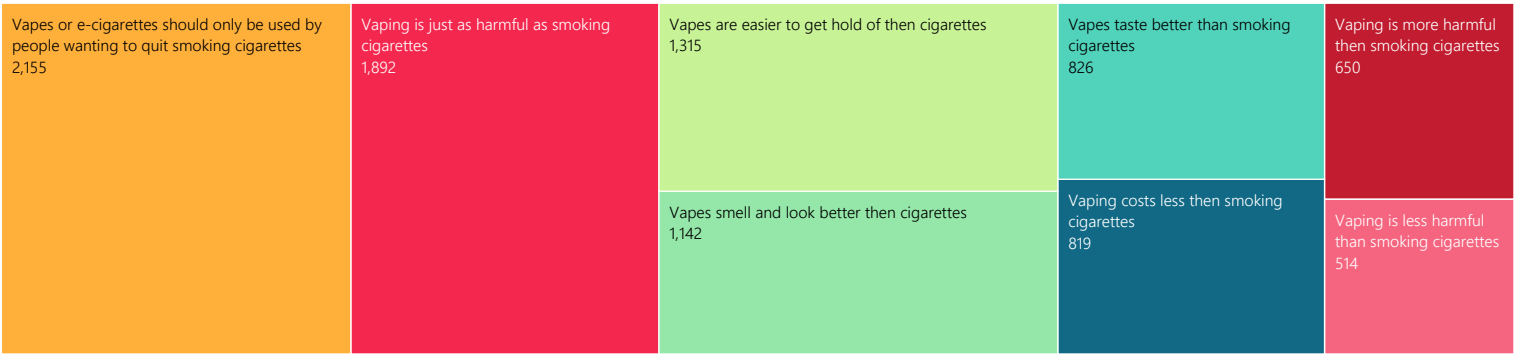
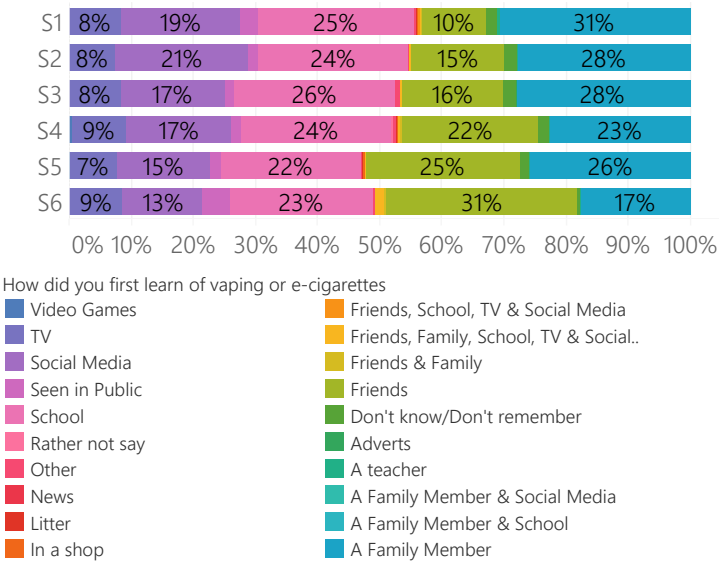
Pupils' View

27% of young people first learnt about vapes from family, 18% first learnt from friends, 24% first learnt from school, 18% first learnt from social media, 8% first learnt from TV and 5% first learnt from other methods including from video games, litter or just seen in public.

This highlights the influence of close social circles and educational environments introducing vaping to young people. Initial exposure varies with age, in which 31% of S1 pupils reported first learning about vapes from family compared to 31% of S6 pupils first learning from friends.

This early exposure, combined with the widespread availability of vapes, may contribute to a normalisation of vaping among young people.

43% of young people believe vaping is just as harmful as smoking cigarettes, with 49% of respondents believing vaping should only be used by people wanting to quit smoking.



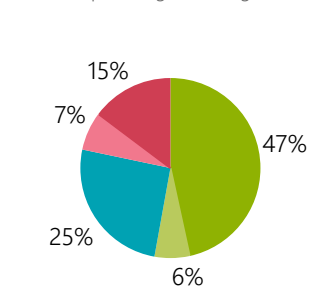
Personal views differed from perceived peer views, indicating a possible discrepancy between private opinions and public behaviours. Views on people who have never smoked or vaped are generally positive, with 53% approve somewhat or strongly of young people have never vaped or smoked compared to 38% that think that others their age would have the same opinion.

Those that strongly approve of young people that have never vaped or smoked (47%) is much higher than that of what they perceive their peers believe (19%).

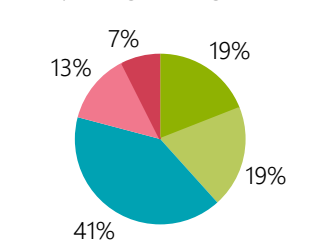
This is the same across genders and age groups.

This discrepancy between personal approval and perceived peer approval suggests that young people might underestimate the support for non-vaping and non-smoking behaviours amongst their peers.

Views on young people who have never used vapes/e-cigarettes/cigarettes

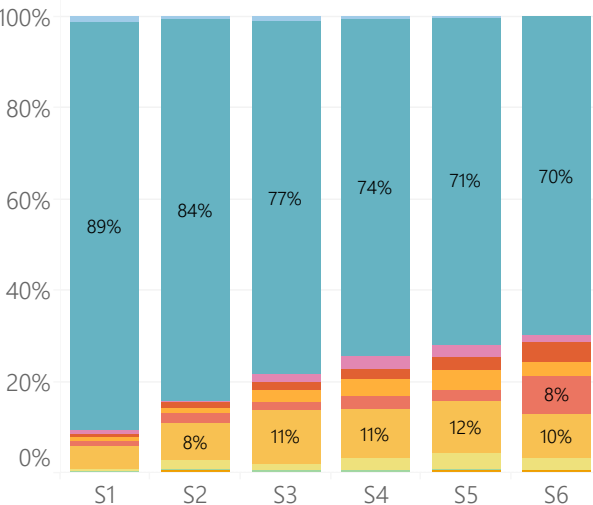


How do you think others your age view young people who have never used vapes/e-cigarettes/cigarettes



- Strongly approve
- Somewhat approve
- Neither approve nor disapprove
- Somewhat disapprove
- Strongly disapprove

As regards cigarette smoking, 70% disapprove somewhat or strongly. This compares to 40% that think that others their age disapprove of smoking.



11% of young people reported vaping regularly. 3% of young people regularly vape and smoke cigarettes. 2% vape once a week or more. 2% use vapes that sometimes or always contain nicotine.

This highlights a segment of the younger population with a potentially higher risk of developing nicotine dependence and other issues.

9% report having vaped in the past, suggesting a significant turnover where some young people experiment with vaping but do not continue the habit in the long-term.

79% of pupils reported they had never tried a vape or cigarette.

- I don't know if the vapes/e-cigarettes I use contain nicotine
- I have never tried a vape or e-cigarette (Go to Q16)
- I use a vape or e-cigarette and also smoke cigarettes everyday
- I use a vape or e-cigarette and also smoke cigarettes sometimes
- I use a vape or e-cigarette once a week or more
- I use a vape or e-cigarette sometimes but no more than once a
- I used to use a vape but I don't use one now
- The vapes/e-cigarettes I use always contain nicotine
- The vapes/e-cigarettes I use never contain nicotine
- The vapes/e-cigarettes I use sometimes contain nicotine

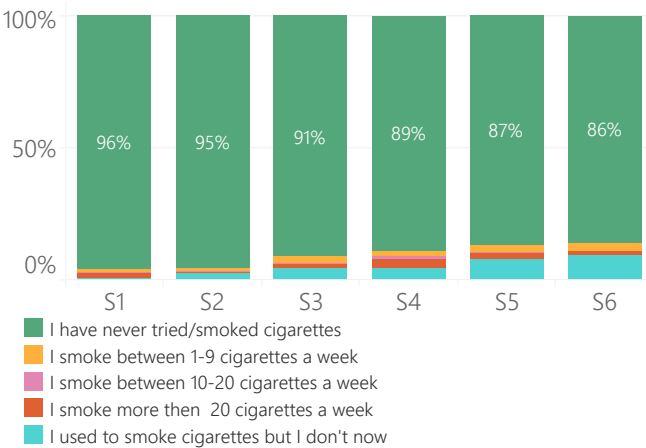
1. Awareness & Perceptions of Vaping and Smoking

Among S6 students, 8% of participants report they vape no more than once a month, suggesting vaping takes place socially in older age groups.

In terms of cigarette smoking, 4% of young people currently smoke regularly. 4% report they previously used to smoke. 92% reported they had never smoked a cigarette.

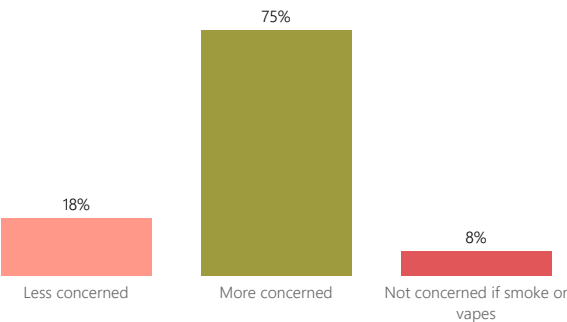
This appears to increase with age. While only 3% of S1 pupils regularly smoke cigarettes and 1% report they are former smokers, these figures rise to

5% of S6 pupils regularly smoke cigarettes and 10% report they previously used to smoke. This trends suggests that as students progress through school, their exposure to and engagement with smoking increases.



This data underscores the importance of targeted interventions that address both vaping and smoking behaviours among young people, particularly as they transition through different school years. It also highlights the need for continuous education on the risks associated with nicotine use and the importance of preventative measures to curb the initiation and regular use of vapes and cigarettes among young people.

Parents' View



75% of parents reported they were more concerned if their child vaped instead of smoking traditional cigarettes.

Parents detailed their reasoning behind their answers to the following themes:

- 1. Equal Concern: Many parents expressed equal concern for both vaping and smoking, indicating a general worry about any form of substance use: "I am concerned about both equally."
- 2. Marketing and Availability: Some parents are worried about the aggressive marketing strategies used for vaping products and their easy availability, "Vaping has overtaken cigarettes and is marketed heavily."

3. Peer Pressure:

Concerns were raised about peer influence and social pressure leading children to try vaping or smoking, "Worried about peer pressure."

4. Parental Influence and Communication:

Participants who believe that their parenting style, open dialogue, and education about the risks will deter their children from vaping or smoking, "Genuinely believe they will try neither as we have an open dialogue."

5. Health Risks:

Concerns about the known and unknown health risks associated with both vaping and smoking. This includes worries about immediate and long-term health consequences, "Both are a risk to health, I have concerns for their long-term impact."

6. Lack of Information or Knowledge:

Some parents highlighted the lack of sufficient information and scientific research on the long-term effects of vaping, "We don't know enough about long-term damage from vaping."

7. Addiction Potential:

Concerns about the addictive nature of both vaping and smoking, with specific mentions of nicotine dependence, "I'm equally concerned about both. Cigarettes are known for addiction and so are vapes."

8. Perception and Misconceptions:

Concerns about the misconception that vaping is less harmful than smoking and the general perception that vaping is safer, "Apparently the health effects are not as bad as smoking."

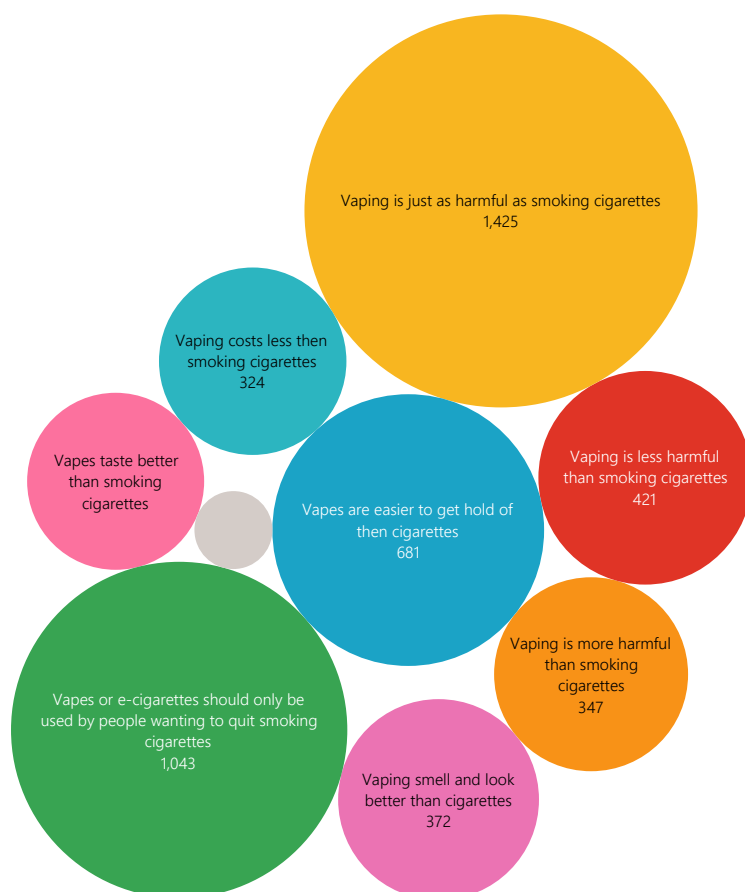
9. Behavioural Concerns:

Concerns related to the behaviour changes that may accompany vaping or smoking, such as secretive behaviour or rebellious attitudes, "My concern would be that smoking vapes would turn into a rebellious habit."

10. Social Acceptance and Trendiness:

Worries that vaping is becoming more socially acceptable and trendy among young people, making it more attractive was highlighted by parents, "It seems to be more popular and more 'socially acceptable' among teens."..."I feel that vaping is glamorized as a fashionable alternative to smoking."

1. Awareness & Perceptions of Vaping and Smoking



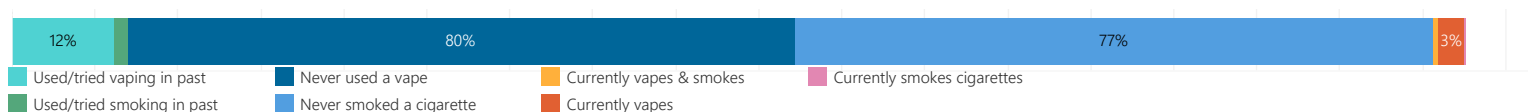
76% of parents felt that vaping is just as harmful as smoking cigarettes. **55%** feel that vapes should only be used by people wanting to quit smoking. **18%** felt that vaping was more harmful than smoking cigarettes.

There is a belief among parents that vapes are easier to obtain and potentially cheaper than cigarettes, potentially contributing to the accessibility and attractiveness of vaping to young people. **36%** believe that vapes are easier to get hold of than cigarettes, with **17%** believing that vaping costs less than smoking. 1 in 5 parents felt that vaping smelt and looked better than cigarettes, with **15%** believing it tastes better than smoking. These sensory factors may influence some people's preferences for vaping or smoking.

22% feel that vaping is less harmful than smoking cigarettes.

3% noted that there is still a lot of unknowns regarding vaping. **0%** believe that vaping is not addictive, suggesting a general consensus on the addictive potential of vaping. This pattern is seen across localities, primary schools and academies.

In summary, parents have substantial concerns about the health impacts of vaping, with more than half of respondents believing that vapes should only be used as a smoking cessation aid rather than a recreational activity. There are mixed views on the potential harm vaping could cause. The consistency of these patterns across academies and primary school parents and localities suggest these views are widely held.



3% of parents responded that their children currently vaped. **12%** reported that their children had vaped in the past, with **2%** had smoked in the past. **80%** reported that their child had never vaped and **77%** had never smoked.

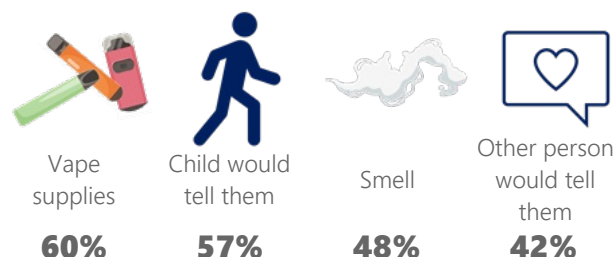
When comparing what year the child attends, **95%** of parents with a child in P5 reported their children had never used a vape before. This decreases with age, in which **63%** of those with a child in S6 had never used a vape before. A similar pattern is seen when reporting they know their child has tried vaping, which increases from **4%** when they have a child in P5 to **23%** in S5.

The majority of parents reported they were aware their child had not tried vaping or smoking. While vaping appears to not be a prevalent long-term habit among most children, there is a significant level of experimentation as children grow older, from 1 in 20 parents with a child in P5 to a quarter of parents with a child in S5. There are variations between localities and variations between parents of children attending academies and primary schools, suggested a need for targeted interventions.

35% of parents reported they were confident (answering definitely yes) they would know that their child was vaping, with **45%** reporting they would probably know. **9%** of parents reported that they were doubtful they would find out their child was vaping.

60% of parents reported they would know their child was vaping from vape supplies, with **57%** believing their child would tell them and **48%** saying they would know from the smell. **42%** would find out their child was vaping from someone else telling them, including their other children.

Views on cigarette smoking are overwhelmingly negative, with **92%** of parents disapproving (**78%** strongly disapproving).



Summary

In conclusion, there is a gap in awareness and perceptions regarding vaping among young people, influenced largely by social circles and social media. This gap is exacerbated by a lack of detailed understanding among both pupils and parents.

2. Access and Influences

Access to vapes and cigarettes appears relatively easy for many young people, in which **70%** of those that access vapes reporting they find it somewhat or very easy to access vapes, **38%** finding it very easy to access vapes.

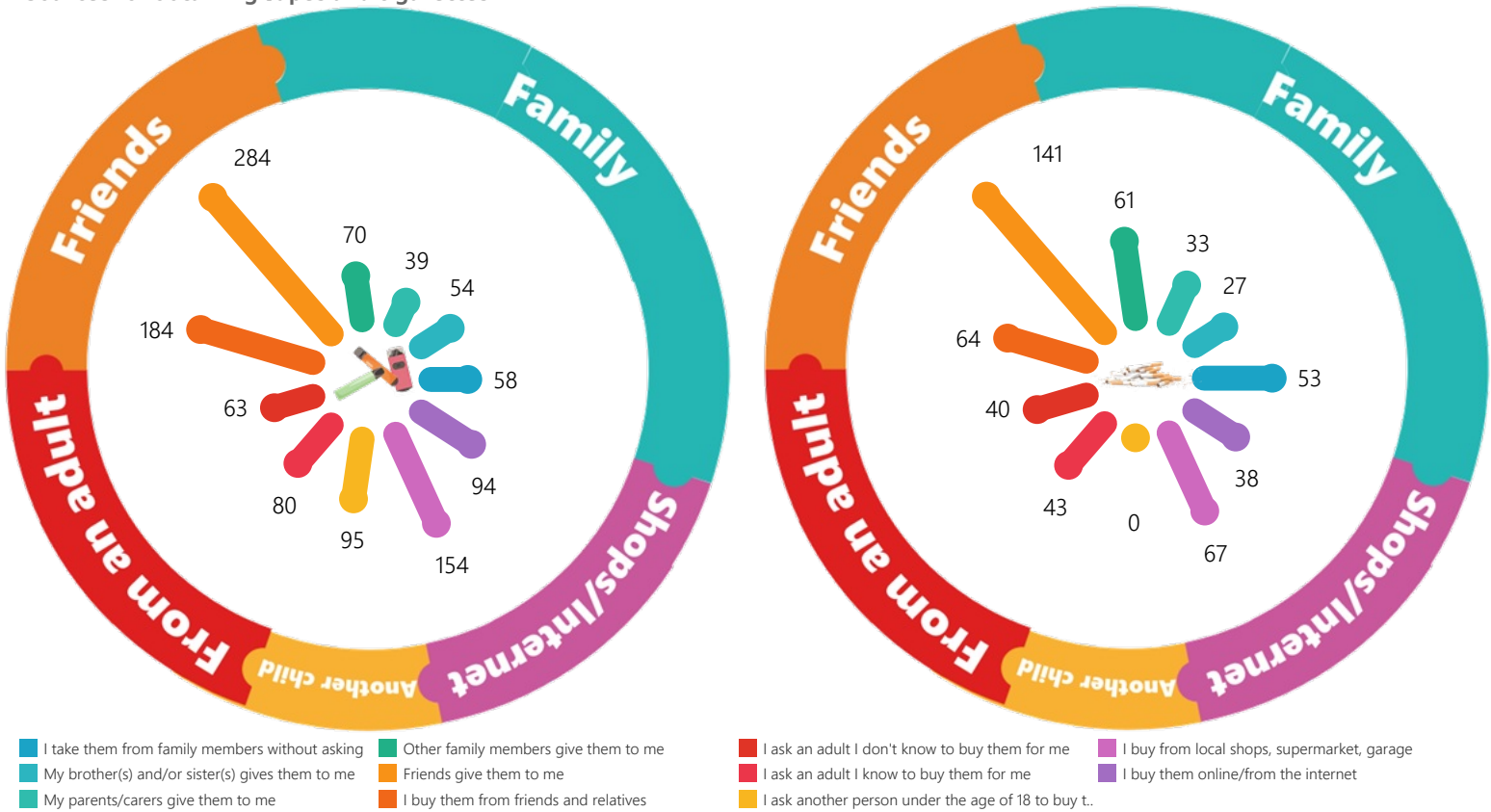
Access appears to become easier with increasing age. Of the S1 pupils that access vapes, **47%** reported they find it somewhat or very easy.

This increased to **88%** for S6 pupils.

Access to cigarettes, while not as prevalent as access to vapes, still poses a significant issue. **50%** of those that access cigarettes reporting they find it somewhat or very easy to. **25%** finding it very easy to access cigarettes. These figures also increased with increasing age.



Sources for obtaining vapes and cigarettes



Young people primarily obtain vapes and cigarettes through their social networks.

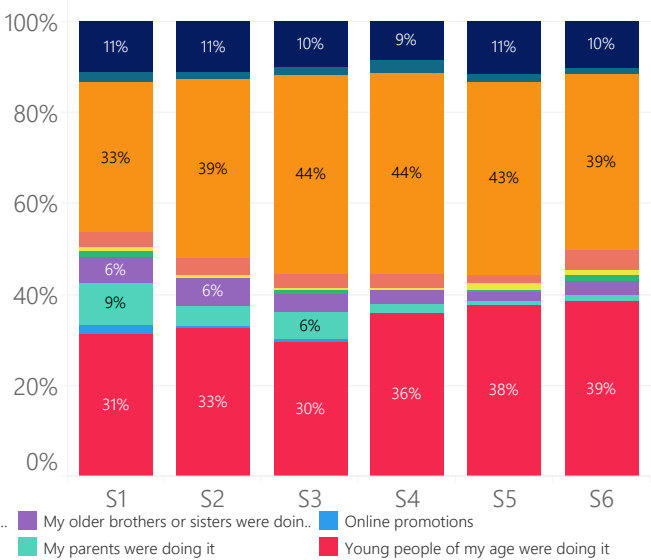
For vapes, **40%** buy or get them from their friends. **20%** ask someone else (whether an adult they know, don't know or other person aged under 18 to buy vapes for them. **13%** source them from local shops.

Similarly for cigarettes, **36%** of those that access cigarettes buy or get them from their friends. **15%** ask someone else, to purchase them and **12%** source them from local shops.

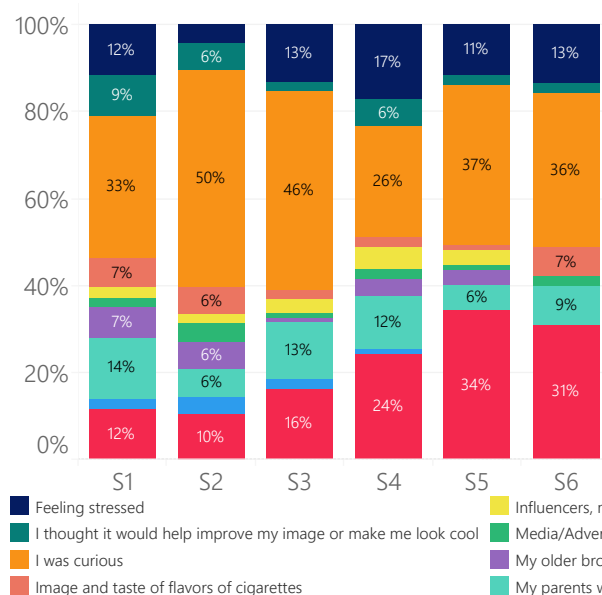
Influences for trying vaping or smoking

41% of those that tried vaping tried out of sheer curiosity. **34%** of young people reported they tried vaping because their peers were vaping. 33 young people reported they felt pressured to try vaping. When comparing genders, **49%** of boys tried out of curiosity compared to **37%** of girls. **40%** of girls reported trying vaping because other young people their age were vaping.

1 in 10 young people reported they tried vaping because they felt stressed. This emphasises the importance of addressing mental health and stress management as part of broader efforts to prevent smoking and vaping amongst young people.



2. Access and Influences



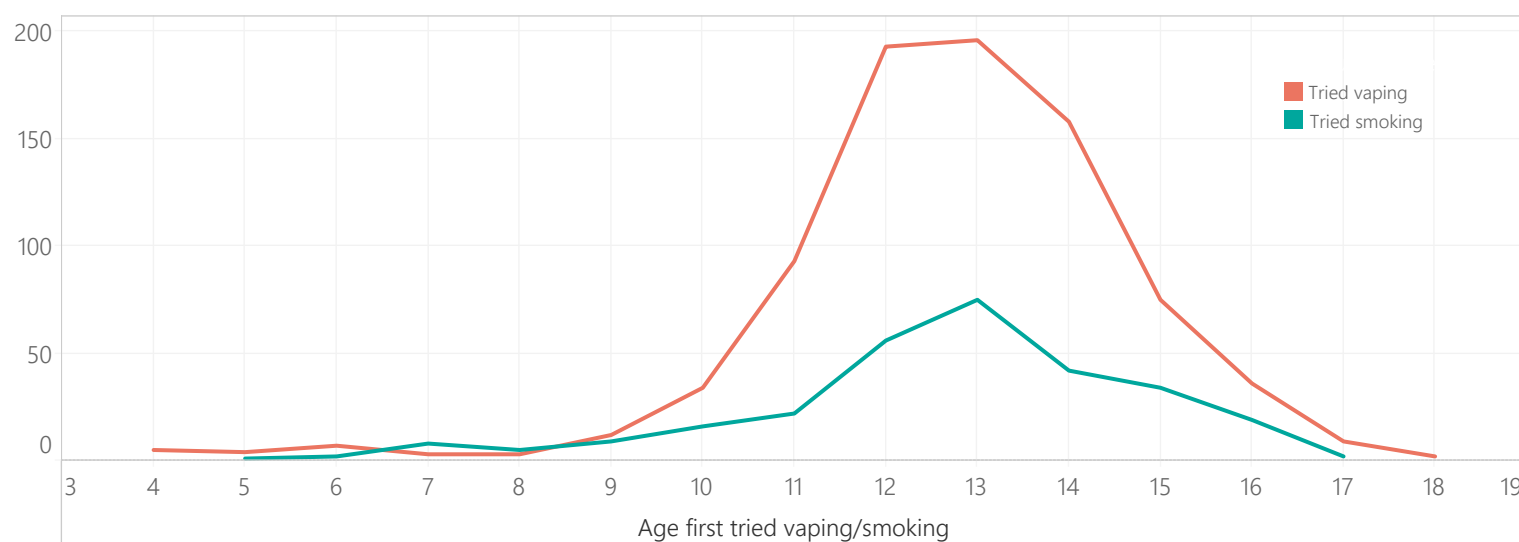
38% of those that tried smoking tried out of sheer curiosity. **22%** of young people reported they tried smoking because their peers were smoking. 9 young people reported they felt pressured to try smoking. When comparing genders, **40%** of boys tried out of curiosity compared to **39%** of girls. **50%** of those that identify as LGBTQIA2S+ reported trying because influencers on social media were smoking.

As age increases, the proportion of those that try smoking because others were smoking increases.

12% of pupils also cited stress relief as a reason for trying smoking, suggesting that more support should be in place for academy students to tackle mental health throughout their school journey.

Motivations for trying vaping and smoking show common trends of curiosity and peer influence. These figures emphasise the role that social environments and peer groups play in the initiation of both vaping and smoking among young people.

Age first tried vaping or smoking



12.7 years old is the average a young person tried vaping, with the youngest someone tried was 4 years old.

12.6 years old is the average age a young person tried smoking, with the youngest someone tried was 5 years old. This suggests that most young people experiment with these habits between the ages of 12 and 13.

This early initiation of vaping and smoking is concerning, as it indicates that adolescents are experimenting with these behaviours during critical developmental years. The youngest instances for trying vaping and smoking, although rare, highlight the urgent need for parental and community awareness and intervention to prevent such early exposure.

Summary

Despite age restrictions and regulations, many young people find it relatively easy to access vaping products and cigarettes, often through social networks, peers, local shops or family. This ease of access undermines public health efforts and suggests a need for stricter enforcement of regulations.

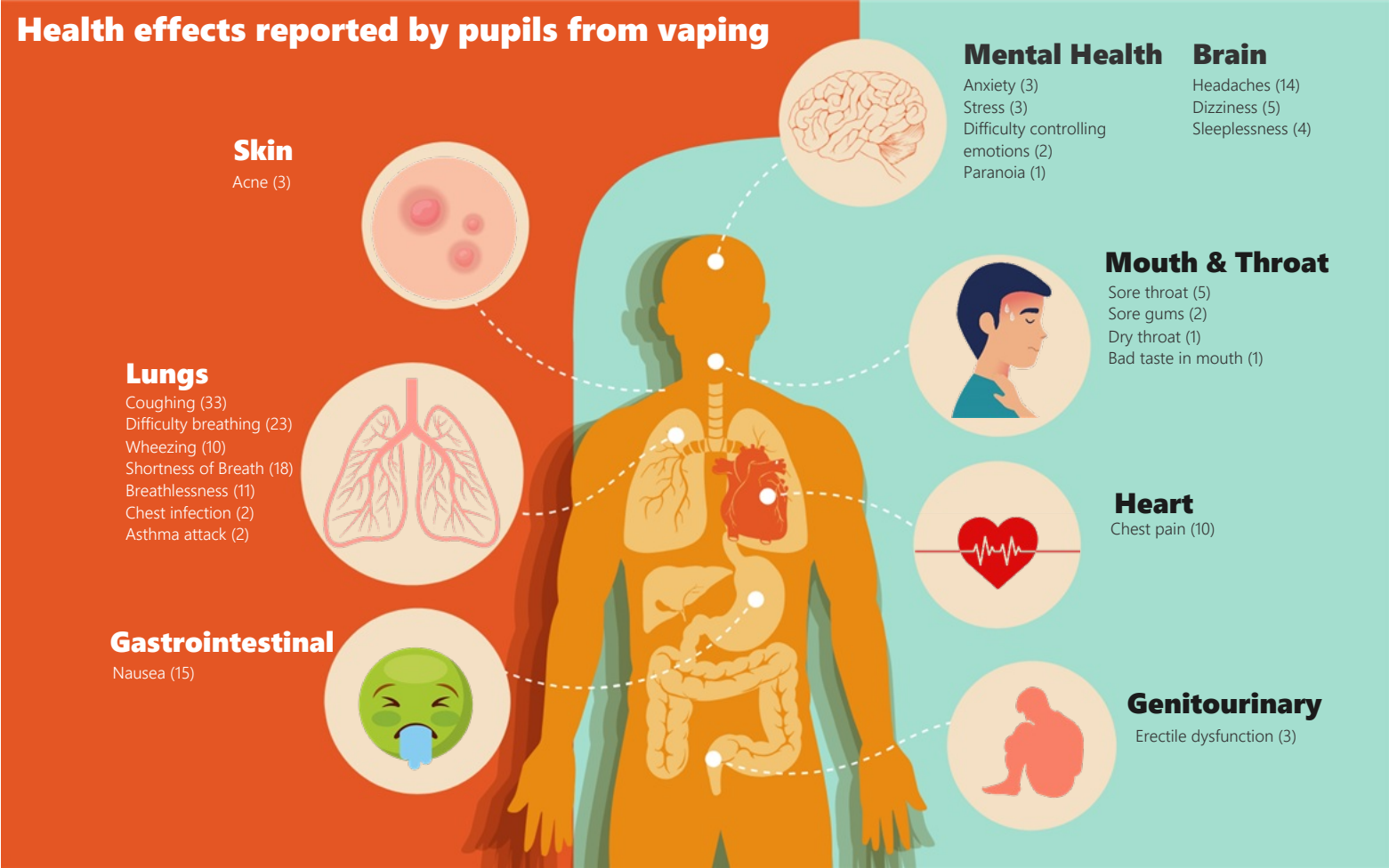
There are many influences on vaping and smoking behaviour, with peer pressure, social acceptance, curiosity, stress and to a lesser extent, family influence, all playing critical roles. Peer influence emerges as the main factor for both habits, where vaping and smoking could be viewed as a normal social activity or a means of fitting in. Curiosity and the desire to experiment continue to drive young people to try despite the known risks.

Reducing access to vapes and cigarettes and counteracting the social and peer influences that encourage smoking require coordinated efforts from parents, schools and government. These efforts should focus on stricter regulation, enhanced education and more robust support systems to guide young people away from these habits.

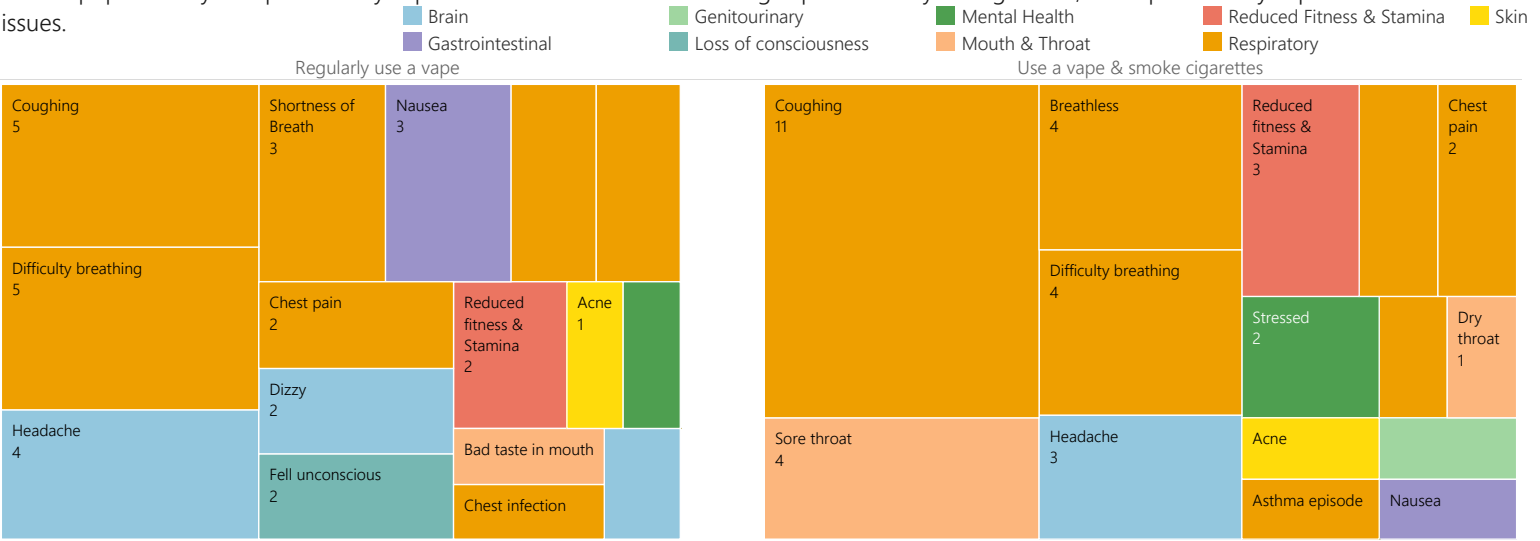
3. Health Risks & Knowledge

92% of students reported they were aware of the potential health risks involved with vaping. 67% of parents reported they were aware of the health risks involved with vaping. 43% of pupils felt that vaping just as harmful as smoking, compared to 76% of parents.

Health effects reported by pupils from vaping



13% of pupils surveyed reported they experienced health issues from using vapes. Similarly for cigarettes, 9% reported they experienced health issues.

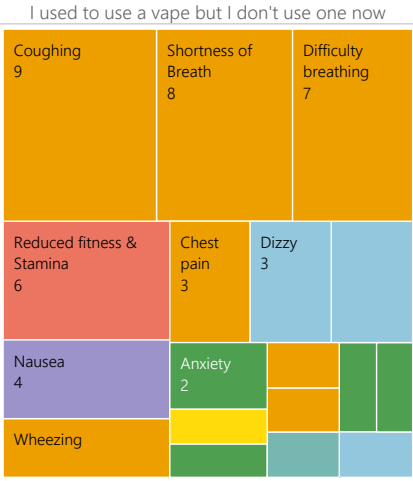


Respiratory issues dominate the most reported health effects among regular vape users, with coughing and difficulty breathing the most common effects.

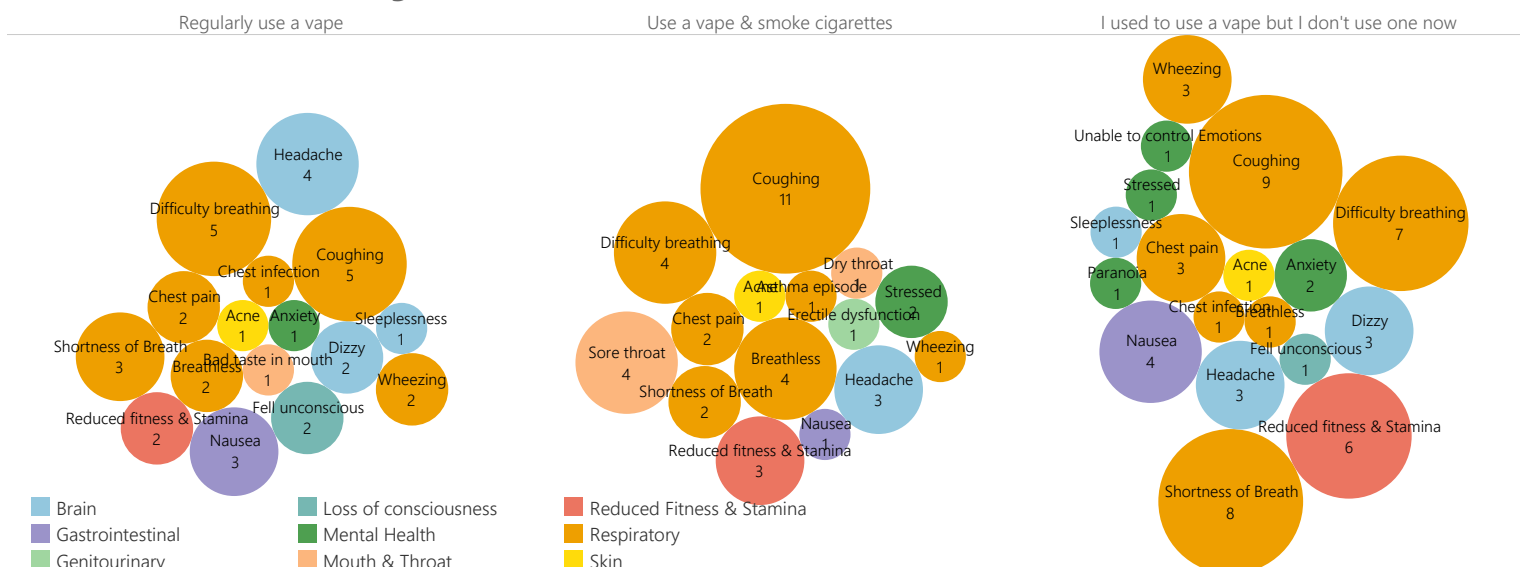
Those who vape and smoke cigarettes reported more health effects of a greater variety compared to regular vapers. These included coughing, difficulty breathing and breathlessness. This group also reported unique issues such as dry and sore throats and asthma episodes, suggesting a potentially higher severity of health effects.

Those who used to vape reported significant respiratory issues including shortness of breath, coughing and difficulty breathing. They also reported a number of mental health issues including anxiety and paranoia. Other notable effects included reduced fitness and stamina, nausea and headaches.

From these charts, it appears that combining vaping and smoking increases health risks. Former vapers reported a broad range of health effects including mental health which may indicate these effects linger after stopping vaping. All groups reported respiratory effects, emphasising the potential long-term impacts of vaping on young people's health.



3. Health Risks & Knowledge



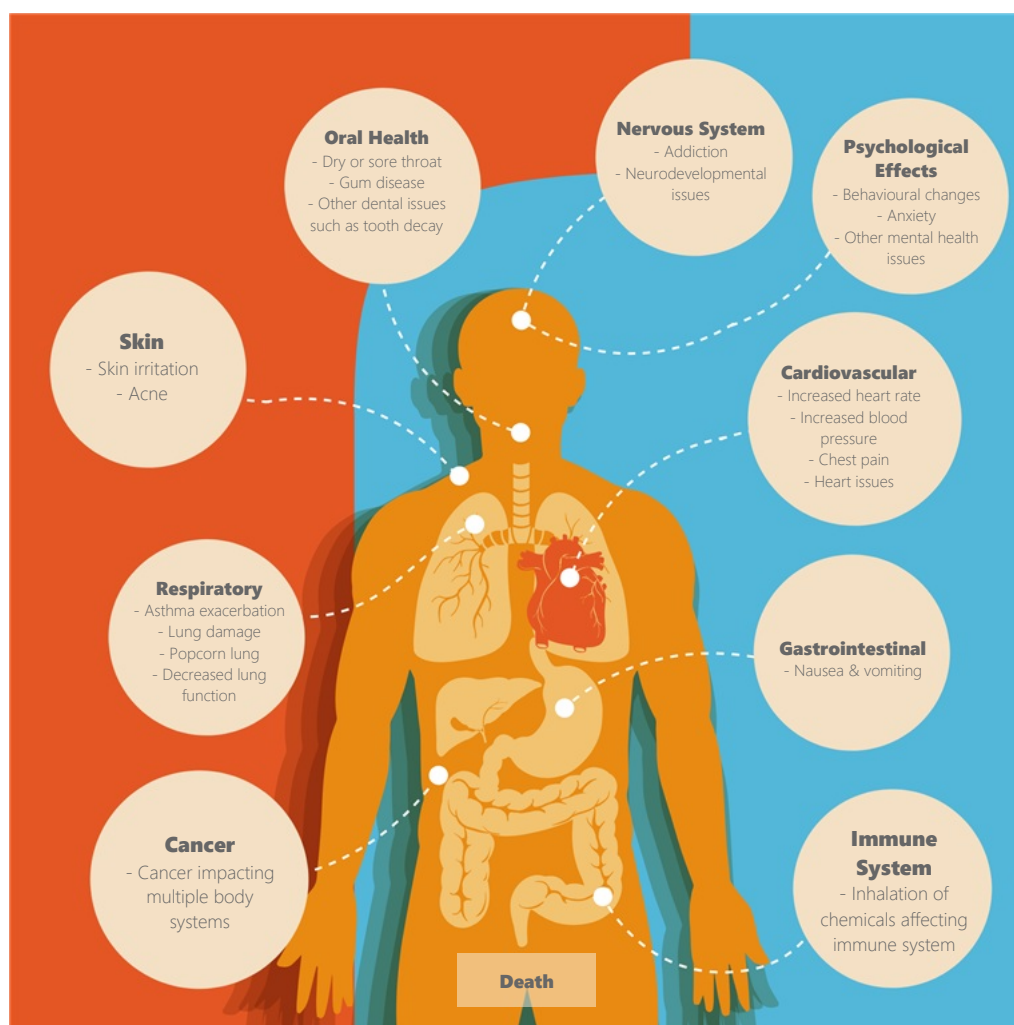
The data reveals a significant health impact from vaping among young people, with a wide range of health effects reported. Respiratory issues dominate the reported effects, with those who vape and smoke reporting health effects of a greater variety compared to regular vapers. Reduced fitness and mental health issues are also prevalent amongst vapers. Those who used to vape reported significant respiratory issues including shortness of breath, coughing and difficulty breathing. They also reported a number of mental health issues including anxiety and paranoia and reduced fitness and stamina.

Parents

The majority of responses (549) included lung issues, such as damage to lungs, e-cigarette or vaping product use-associated lung injury (EVALI) and difficulty breathing. 115 parents noted "popcorn lung" a condition related to vaping, reflecting some awareness of more detailed health risks.

158 parents noted addiction, both nicotine and addiction in general as a well recognised risk of vaping. 42 parents compared the risks of vaping to cigarette smoking.

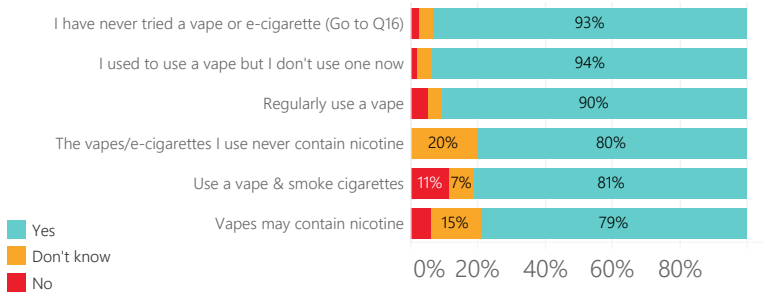
To summarise, parents have a partial understanding of the health risks associated with vaping, primarily focusing on addiction and lung-related issues. Their responses do not consistently cover all known health impacts, indicating that there is a gap in their knowledge regarding the full spectrum of potential health risks of vaping. This suggests a need for more comprehensive educational efforts to ensure parents are fully informed about the dangers associated with young people vaping. A number of participants noted health effects were "same as cigarettes?" suggesting there is some uncertainty of their understanding rather than confidence in their knowledge.



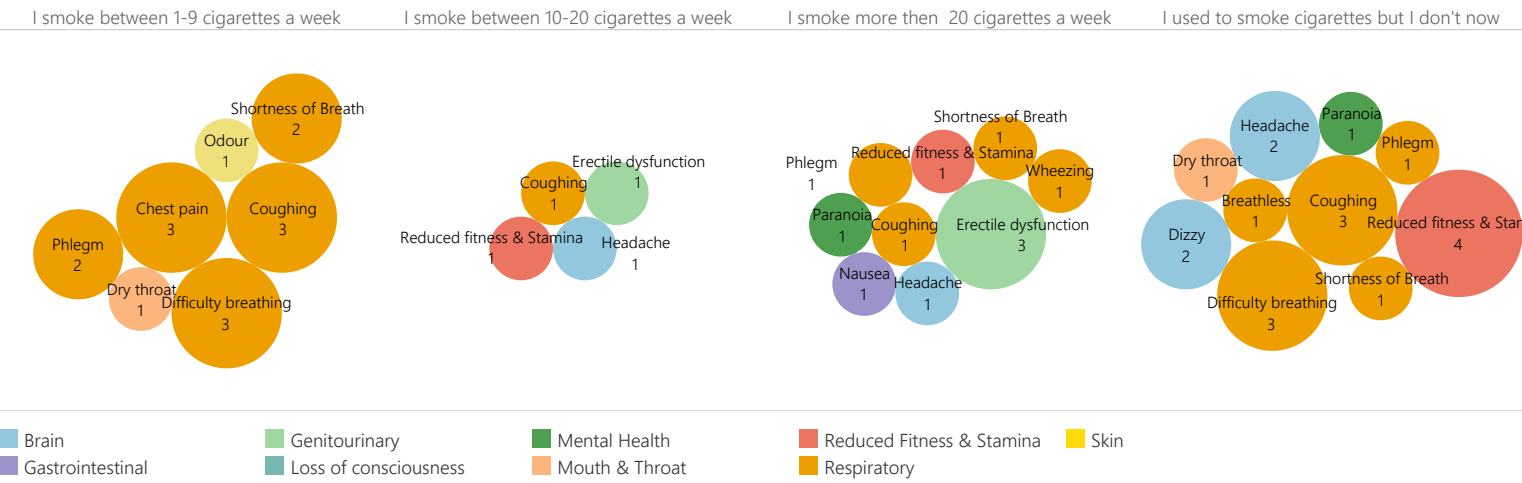
3. Health Risks & Knowledge

The highest awareness is among those who used to vape but don't use one now and those who have never tried vaping. The lowest awareness is among those who use vapes that contain or may contain nicotine and those who believe their vapes do not contain nicotine.

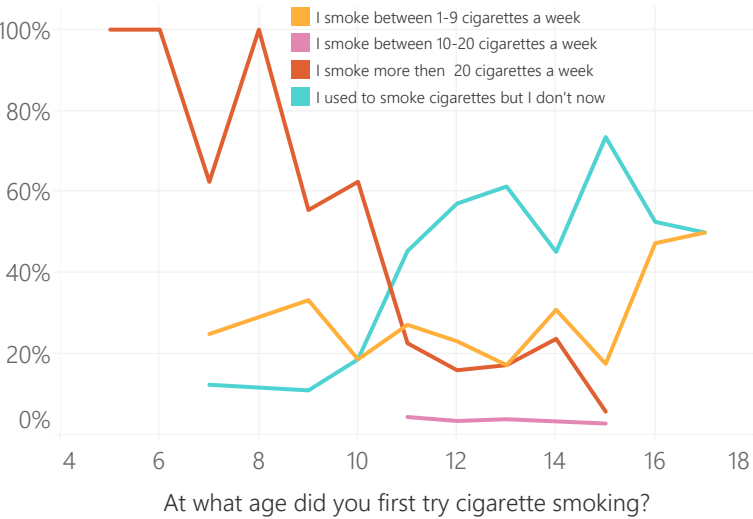
The highest uncertainty of risks is from those using nicotine-free vapes, possibly due to a misconception that nicotine-free products are harmless. The highest proportion of young people who are unaware of the health risks are those that vape and smoke cigarettes.



Correlation of age the young person first tried smoking, whether the young person has experienced any health effects from smoking and smoking use



Health effects reported correlate with smoking frequency. Those that smoke between 1-9 cigarettes a week report mainly respiratory issues including coughing. With increasing smoking frequency, a broader range of health effects are reported, including mental health, reduced fitness and stamina, nausea and headaches. Those that used to smoke reported a wide range of health effects, with reduced fitness and stamina, difficulty breathing and coughing the most common.

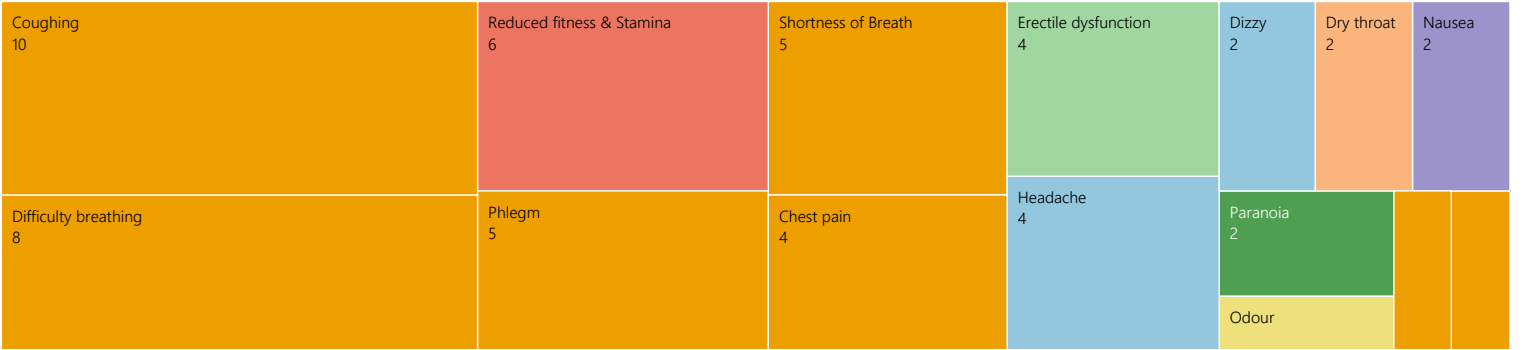


Those who started between 4 and 8 have a significant representation among heavy smokers (smoking more than 20 cigarettes a week. Those who smoke between 1-9 cigarettes per week have a more consistent and lower presence across ages. Those who started around 12-14 is associated with moderate smoking frequency, but many in this age group are former smokers.

There is a peak in former smokers who started smoking between ages 14 and 16 suggesting that starting smoking later in teenage years correlated with a higher likelihood of quitting.

In summary, the age of initiation is a significant factor in predicting smoking frequency and cessation likelihood.

The data reveals a wide range of health effects reported by young people who smoke cigarettes, spanning respiratory, mental health, fitness, genitourinary, skin, neurological and gastrointestinal categories. The most frequently reported health issues are respiratory-related.



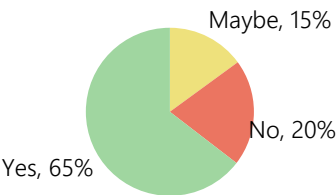
3. Health Risks & Knowledge

65% of parents reported they felt equipped to have a conversation with their child regarding vaping and smoking.

This increases to 68% of parents with children in academies, and decreases to 61% of parents with children in primary schools.

27% of Banff & Buchan parents reported they did not feel equipped to have a conversation with their child about vaping, the highest out of any of the localities. The lowest proportion of parents that were not aware of restrictions was 17% in Formartine, Kincardine & Mearns and Marr, equivalent to 1 in 6 parents.

The data indicates that although the majority of parents feel they are equipped to have a conversation about vaping with their children, 1 in 3 parents do not feel equipped (reporting maybe or no), with significant variations between localities and some variations between parents of children of academy age and of primary school age.



Overall these findings highlight a need for better information dissemination across different regions and school types for parents, young people and the wider community to feel fully equipped to discuss vaping.

For those that reported where they sourced their information about vaping, the responses have been categorised into the below themes:

1. Online Resources

This was the most common source of information in which 782 parents noting they would look online for signposting, suggesting a heavy reliance on the internet, including sites such as NHS or the BBC. The overwhelming reliance on online resources emphasises the importance of accurate and accessible digital health information.

2. Medical professionals

340 responses indicated seeking information from GPs, pharmacists and other medical professionals.

3. Personal experience

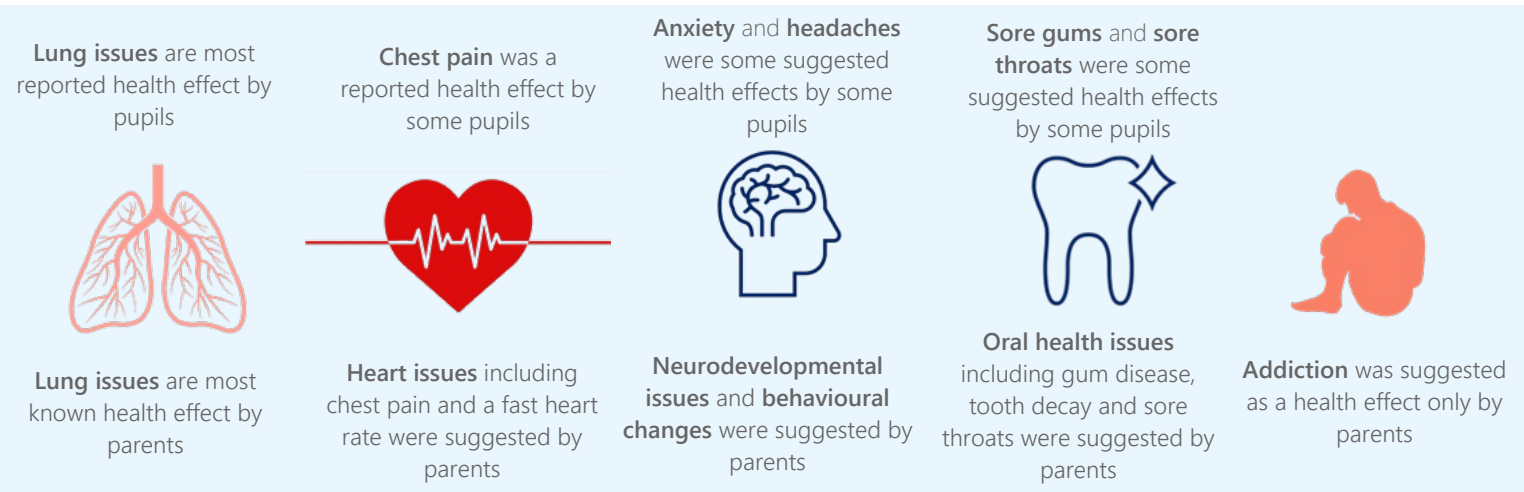
133 parents noted they sourced information from previous personal use of vapes or cigarettes and information from friends and family experiences. This would influence perceptions and behaviours. Others also noted knowledge from word of mouth.

4. Media

143 parents noted they sourced information from the media. General media sources, TV and the news were the main sources of information. This highlights that the media play a critical role in disseminating information about vaping.

5. Work and Education

Information from their professional knowledge or from work and education, such as health science and work in the police, has also been highlighted.



Summary

The data reveals a significant health impact from both vaping and smoking among young people, with a wide range of health effects reported.

The findings from both pupils and parents reveal a concerning gap in awareness and understanding of the health risks associated with vaping, particularly among young people. While most pupils are aware that vaping carries health risks, there is a significant lack of detailed knowledge about the specific dangers, with many students and parents perceiving vaping as less harmful than smoking traditional cigarettes (1 in 10 pupils, 22% of parents). This misconception is further compounded by the ease of access to vaping products, suggesting that despite awareness of potential risks, the perceived severity of these risks is not enough to deter their usage.

Parents, whilst generally more aware of the health risks associated with vaping, often feel under-equipped to engage in informed conversations with their children about the dangers, with 1 in 3 parents surveyed reported they did not feel equipped to have a conversation with their child. This highlights the need for better education and resources to empower parents to effectively communicate the risks to their children.

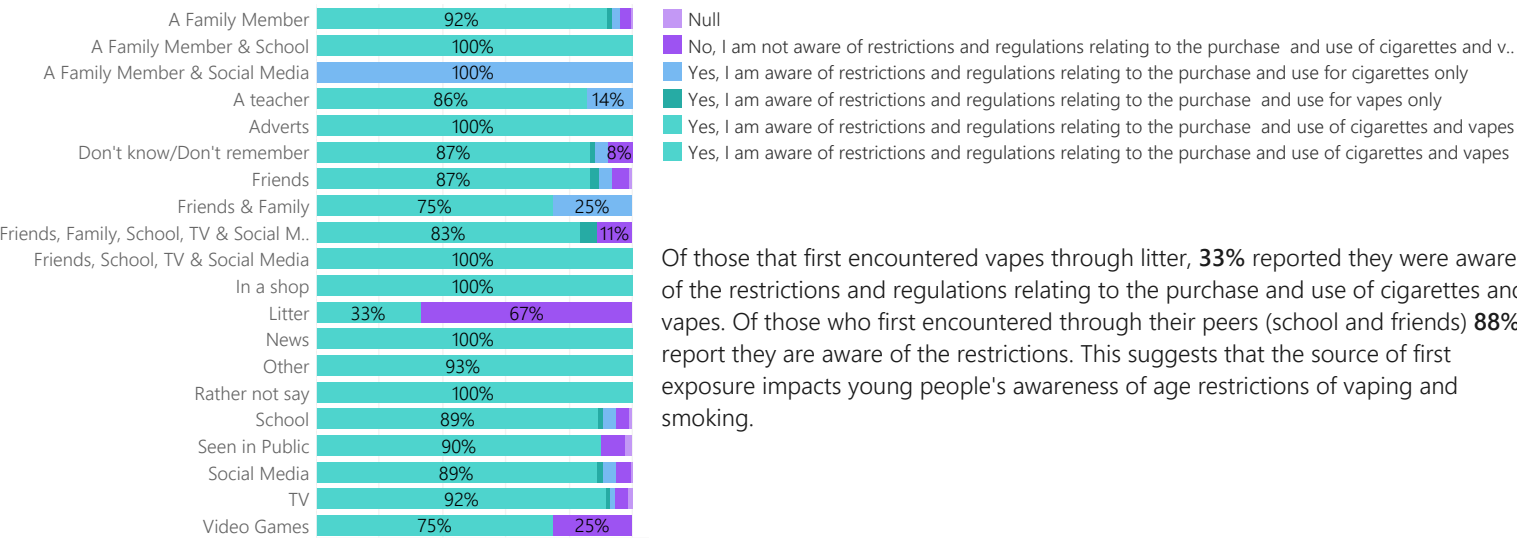
In summary, the current awareness of vaping's health risks is insufficient to effectively prevent and reduce its usage among young people. This calls for enhanced educational initiatives, better access to information for parents and teachers, and a more proactive approach to communicating the serious health implications of vaping.

4. Regulation and Support

Regulations

Pupils

Awareness of legal age restrictions and regulations was high, with **90%** reporting they are aware of the restrictions and regulations relating to the purchase and use of cigarettes and vapes. **200** young people reported that they were not aware of any restrictions and regulations.



Of those that first encountered vapes through litter, **33%** reported they were aware of the restrictions and regulations relating to the purchase and use of cigarettes and vapes. Of those who first encountered through their peers (school and friends) **88%** report they are aware of the restrictions. This suggests that the source of first exposure impacts young people's awareness of age restrictions of vaping and smoking.

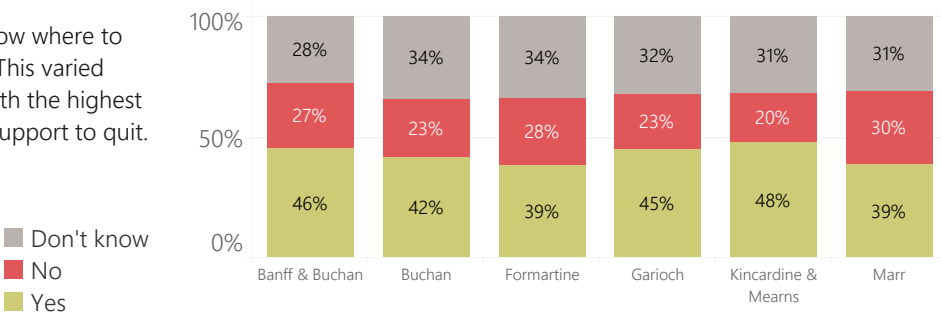
Parents

82% of parents reported they were aware of restrictions relating to the purchase and use of vapes and cigarettes.

This increases to **86%** of parents with children in academies, but decreases to **80%** of parents with children in primary schools.

Support

Only **43%** of students surveyed reported they would know where to seek support if they wanted to quit vaping or smoking. This varied across localities, with those attending schools in Marr with the highest proportion of those that would not know where to seek support to quit.



For parents, this is similar to pupils, in which **44%** of parents reported they knew where to seek support if their child wanted to quit vaping or smoking. Those with a child attending school in Garioch had the highest proportion who would not know where to seek advice, with **59%** of parents.

Parents that noted they did know of where to seek support, responses have been categorised into the below themes:

1. Chemist/Pharmacist

123 parents mentioned seeking help from chemists or pharmacists, indicating the initial reliance on medical professionals for accessible over-the-counter solutions and advice.

2. Online services

This was the most common response, with 156 parents noting this was the main place to seek support. The prominence of online services suggests a preference for digital resources, including websites, forums and telehealth options for support and information.

3. School Support

Schools are noted as crucial environments for providing support, with 112 suggesting this as somewhere to seek support, with teachers and educational programs playing a significant role in intervention and prevention.

4. Doctor/GP

Medical professionals such as GPs and other doctors are trusted sources for more formal medical advice and potentially prescriptions or referrals to specialised services.

5. Family Support

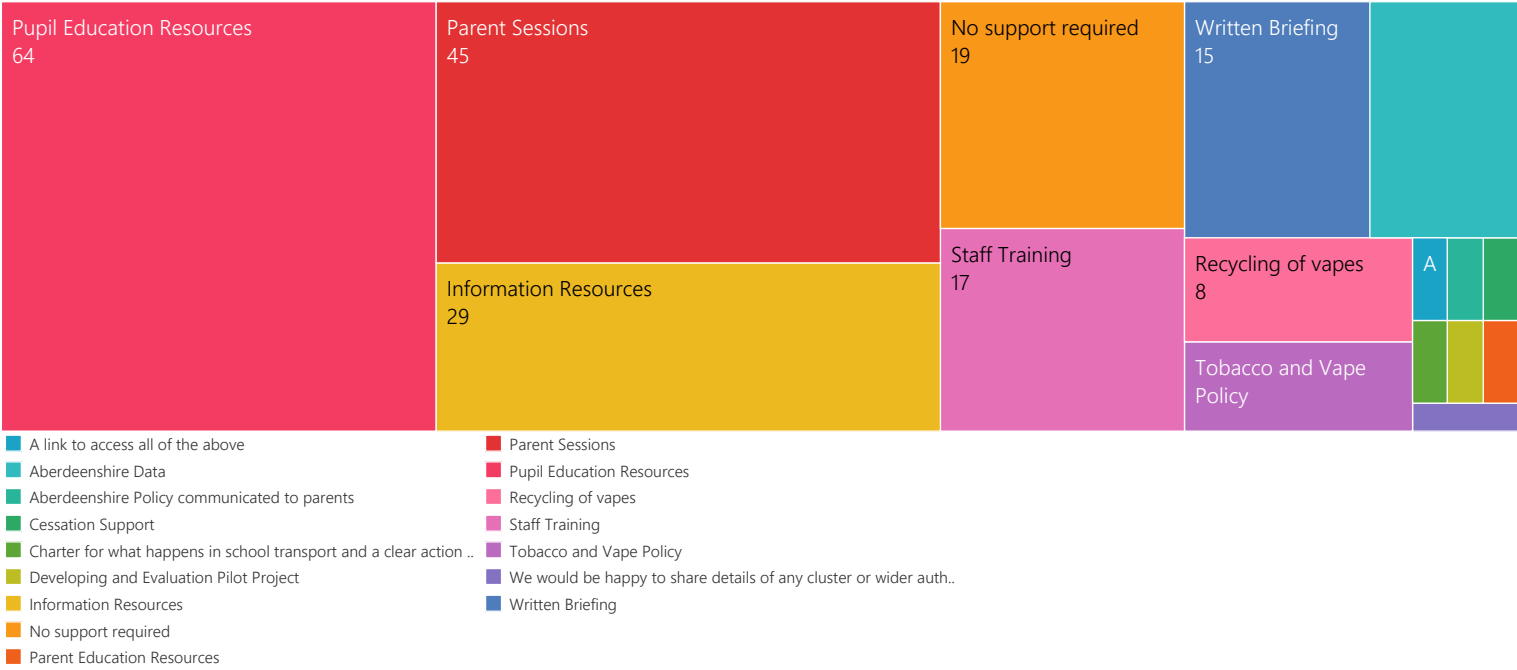
25 suggested family support, recognised for its importance in providing a supportive environment and encouraging open discussions about quitting.

6. Counselling

Counselling services highlight the need for mental health support and professional psychological help in quitting vaping or smoking.

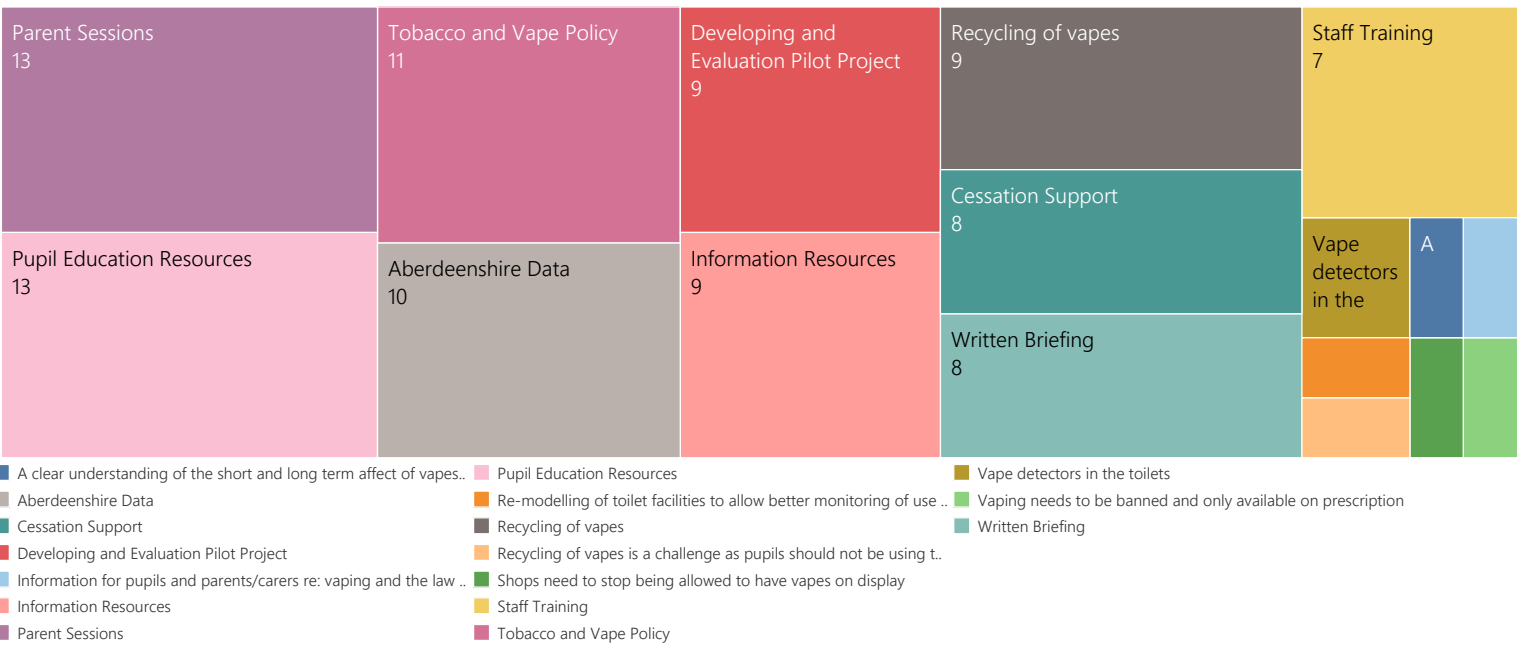
4. Regulation and Support

Schools



60% of primary schools highlighted they would like to be supported with pupil education resources. 42% of primary schools reported they would like support with parent sessions.

All academies reported they would like to be supported. 76% of academies highlighted that they would like to be supported with parent sessions and pupil education resources.



Summary

The data reveals a mixed level of awareness across parents and pupils. Among pupils, while there is a general awareness of age restrictions and regulations related to vaping, many still find it relatively easy to access vaping products. This suggests that existing regulations may not be effectively enforced or communicated to young people, leading to a disconnect between knowledge of the law and actual behaviour.

Parents are somewhat informed about age restrictions, although this differs when they have a child in primary vs secondary education. This uncertainty is compounded by a lack of clear, accessible resources and support services aimed at helping parents navigate this issue.

Schools, both primary and secondary, face significant challenges providing educational support to students on vaping. Many schools reported the need for additional resources, such as educational materials, online resources and training for staff, to better address the issue of vaping. There is also a strong desire for more effective engagement strategies with parents and guardians, indicating a need for a collaborative approach to regulation and support.

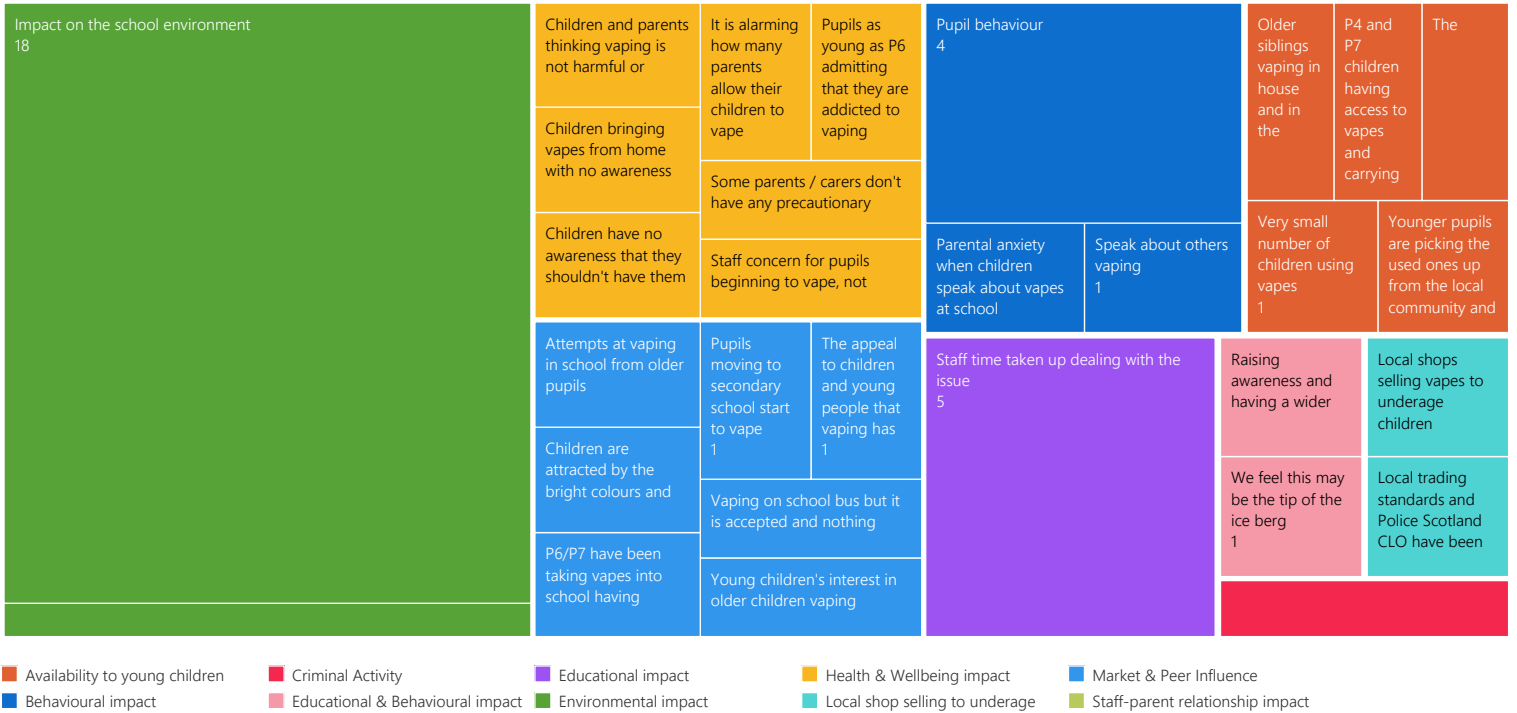
In conclusion, while there is a general awareness of the age restrictions around vaping, the enforcement and practical application of these regulations are inconsistent and insufficient. To bridge this gap, there needs to be a concerted effort to strengthen regulatory enforcement, improve the accessibility of support services, and foster collaboration between schools, parents, and policymakers. This approach will ensure that all stakeholders are better equipped to manage and mitigate the risks of vaping among young people.

5. Impacts of Vaping on School Environments

Primary Schools

22% of primary schools reported that vaping was impacting their school, with 33% reporting that it was having a negative impact. Impact on the school environment was the biggest impact on primary schools, with vape litter in the playground the most common negative impact.

A number of schools reported that children seemed "fascinated and intrigued" and were "attracted by the bright colours and size", of vapes, noting that children "believe vaping is aimed at children due to the flavours e.g. bubblegum"



Academies

All academies reported that vaping was impacting their school, with 82% reporting it was negative.

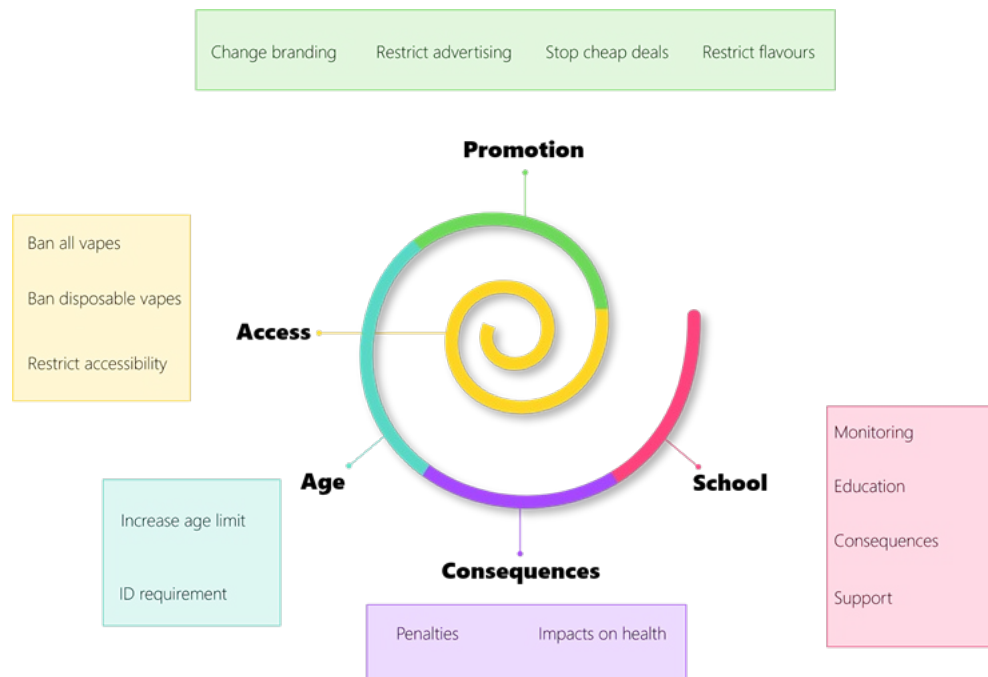
Academies reported that vaping in the toilet, causing other pupils anxiety and missing learning, was the most common negative impact (all 17 schools reported this). Health and Wellbeing impact represents the biggest impact, with schools reporting that pupils do not understand the health risks surrounding vaping, with pupils who have never smoked vaping and that a number of young people are becoming addicted to vapes. 7 schools noted that vape waste in now an issue they must address, with another 5 highlighting that vape litter was now found down toilets. 6 schools reported that vaping was prevalent from S1 to S6.

Staff time taken up dealing with the issue of vaping is highlighted as the biggest impact schools see, with 8 academies reporting this. 16 schools reported an educational impact as the biggest impact they are facing, with a loss of learning time, disruption caused by taking staff away from jobs. Behavioural impact is the second biggest impact schools face, with some schools highlighting pupil behaviour as a major impact, with intimidation in school toilets impacting pupils of all ages. Health and wellbeing impacts are a major impact secondary schools are reporting, with a hidden impact of addiction meaning pupils must frequently leave class to "get their fix" and it is becoming evident.



6. Solutions and Prevention Strategies

Pupils' View



Young people suggested a range of potential effective measures to reduced vaping and smoking in young people. This has been grouped into five main themes: access, promotion, age, consequences and schools.

Access:

1 in 4 young people believe that there should be a national ban on vaping (24%), with participants noting "unless there's a full ban, people will always find a way to vape underage". Disposable vapes were also suggested to be banned. A number of participants also suggested restricting availability of vapes, including through prescription-only availability, increasing prices and making vapes "less visible" in shops: "Put them in chemists for people stopping smoking.... make vapes more expensive and harder to get"

Promotion:

Participants suggested restricting vaping advertising could reduce the influence on young people, ensuring that the marketing is no longer exploitative of the vulnerabilities of children, "social media/trends influence young people quite a lot, so if there was less advertising, not as many influencers/celebrities smoking"

Changing branding was also suggested, such as making vapes less attractive to young people: "They should have covers like fags and change the packaging so they are less appealing to kids".

A number of participants suggested stopping "cheap deals" on vapes in shops, with some suggesting "vapes are advertised on posters, shops do deals 2 for a tenner 3 for £12, stop that".

Lastly, 4% suggested changing, reducing or ensuring there was no flavour at all. 4% suggested making them less colourful and more 'bland'.

Age:

5% suggested that there should be a higher age limit, with shops requiring an ID to be shown in order to buy a vape: "NZ approach: increase legal age to buy them each year until nobody can legally buy them... make people who purchase them show ID".

Consequences:

6% believe there should be stricter regulations and greater enforcement of the law. Some participants suggested fines, "whoever sells vapes to people underage should get a large fine and a ban to sell them... fine people who are under age vapers, increase action taken against vaping underage".

The consequences of vaping on health were also emphasised, 1 in 20 participants believe there should be a campaign/education awareness highlighting the negative impacts: "strongly emphasising that vapes are just as bad as cigarettes.... show all the health consequences, showing people what happens to ur body when u vape".

Schools:

A number of participants suggested greater monitoring in schools, such as vape detectors or the ability for staff to search those suspected with carrying vapes: "allowing teachers or trusted adults to search the student/bag if suspected of using vapes or cigarettes...vape detectors in the toilets would be useful... or in entrance of schools".

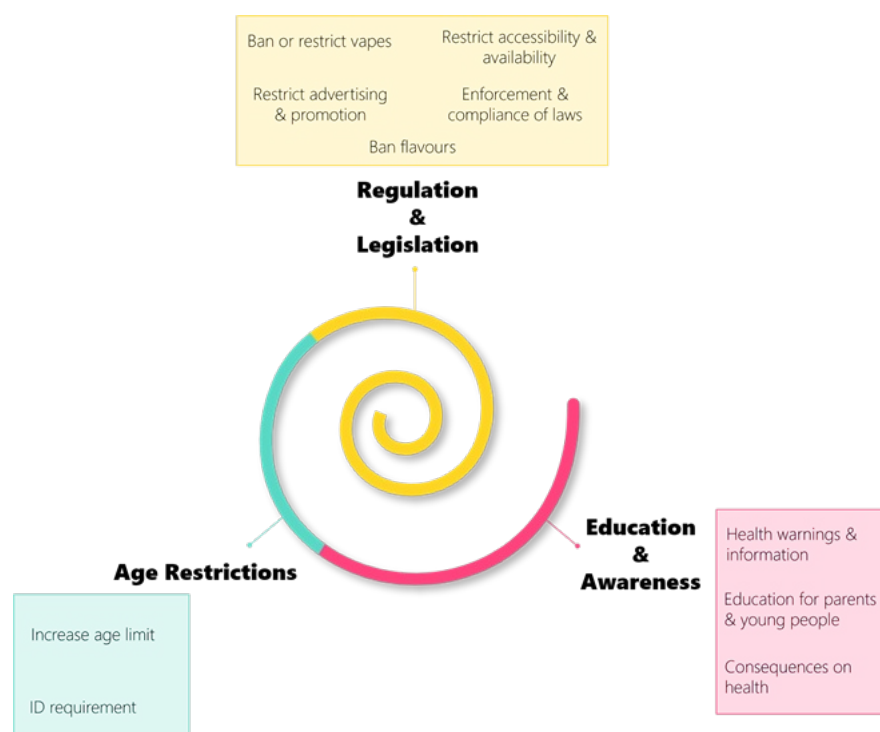
Having more education in school on vaping, such as "bring in a NHS nurse/doctor to explain to the kids why vaping is bad... posters and information around the school about the dangers of vaping... teach it in primary school and highlight the health risks".

A number suggested more consequences at school for vaping, including "disciplinary measures when caught vaping... speak to parents if their child vapes or smokes... expel people who smoke/vape with a zero tolerance policy".

Lastly, more support was suggested, including "amnesty bins... accessible support for those trying to quit...making sure people are feeling OK, mental and physical".

6. Solutions and Prevention Strategies

Parents' View



Parents suggested the following preventative measures:

Regulation and Legislation - Ban or Restrict Vapes

Many parents believe that a ban on selling vaping products, with 563 suggesting an outright ban or banning disposable vapes could be effective: "A ban on vapes except for those trying to quit smoking"..."Ban it entirely or at least for anyone under 25"

Regulation and Legislation - Accessibility and Availability Control

Parents suggested making it more difficult and expensive to obtain vaping products: "Make it harder to buy"..."Restrict access"..."make it expensive and make harsher punishments for selling to minors"

Regulation and Legislation - Advertising and Promotion Regulations

Calls for stronger regulations on advertising to reduce the appeal of vaping were also suggested by parents: "stop promoting it, stop making it look pretty and attractive"..."a viral campaign making it unacceptable/uncool"

Regulation and Legislation - Enforcement and Compliance

It was suggested that existing laws are not enforced rigorously, leading to continued access by underage along with calls for stricter policies at schools and stronger legal penalties for violations: "increase funding for enforcement agencies, conduct regular compliance checks and impose severe penalties for violations"..."stricter rules and stronger punishment at school"..."larger fines for shops selling to underage"

Regulation and Legislation - Ban flavours

Flavours are believed to attract young users, so banning particular appealing flavours was suggested: "policy changes to ban or restrict the sale of flavoured vaping products"

Age Restrictions - Increase age limit & requirement of ID

There was a consistent call for stronger age restrictions, ensuring that vapes could only be bought with photo ID: "Stronger age restrictions and proof of age."..."implementation of advanced age verification technologies and stricter penalties for non-compliance"

Education and Branding - Health Warnings and Information

Increasing the visibility and intensity of health warnings is seen as a key measure to deter vaping: "More health warnings"..."promote the health risks they can have"..."Vapes need to be treated like cigarettes. Packaging should be dark colours and have warnings on them, they should be hidden away from sight in shops."

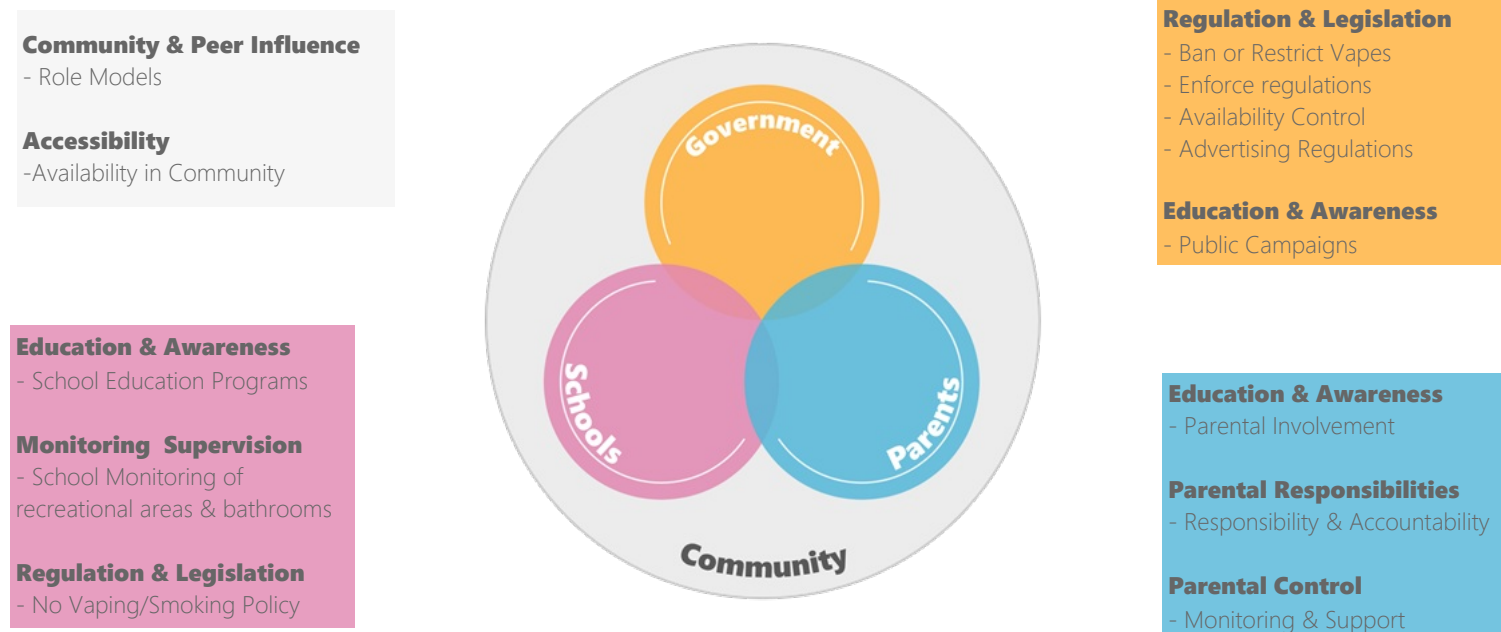
Education and Awareness - Parents and Young People

There is a significant belief that informed parents and young people would be less likely to engage in vaping, "develop comprehensive education programs targeting both demographics, possibly through school curricula and community workshops"

Education and Awareness - Consequences Education

Awareness of health risks has been suggested: "launch awareness campaigns that highlight the short and long-term impacts of vaping, leveraging social media and other platforms popular among youth"

6. Solutions and Prevention Strategies



Parents were asked to what roles and responsibilities government, schools and parents play in preventing vaping and smoking in young people. These have been split into the below themes:

Government Role

1. Regulation and Legislation - Ban or Restrict Vapes

There is a strong call for banning or significantly restricting the availability of vapes, with some suggesting making them prescription-only, "Vapes need to be banned or much less accessible."... "Government should make vapes prescription only."

2. Regulation and Legislation - Regulation Enforcement

Some parents highlighted the need for the government to enforce existing regulations more strictly: "Government should regulate it the same way they regulate tobacco."... "Ensure compliance with laws through regular inspections and penalties for violations"

3. Regulation and Legislation - Availability Control

Some responses suggest that the government should make vapes less accessible, either by limiting where they can be sold or making them more expensive, "Make access prohibitive - expensive, unavailable in many places."

4. Regulation and Legislation - Advertising Regulations

Calls for stronger regulations on advertising to reduce the appeal of vaping: "The government play a big part in limiting the advertising of products and legislating against use of these products"... "Need to strongly advertise the negative effects."

5. Education and Awareness - Public Campaigns

Parents highlighted a need for public campaigns similar to anti-smoking campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers of vaping to all individuals, beyond young people: "A campaign like the dangers of smoking ones should be launched."... "Launch nationwide campaigns to educate the public, especially youth, about the dangers of vaping and smoking"... "More awareness of the cold hard facts."

Parental Role

6. Education and Awareness - Parental Involvement

There is a significant focus on involving parents in the education process and making them aware of their role in preventing vaping, "Parents need to get in young. Vaping is not a harmless habit."... "Have open and honest conversations with their children about these risks and the importance of making healthy choices."... "It's the role of parents and teachers to educate them of the risks of vaping/smoking"

7. Parental Responsibilities - Responsibility and Accountability

Emphasising the primary role of parents in preventing vaping through responsible parenting and accountability was also suggested: "Parents are the first who have responsibilities."... "How any parent could stand by and do nothing when their child vapes is beyond me."

8. Parental Control - Monitoring and Support

Emphasis on parents monitoring their children's behaviour and controlling their access to money to prevent purchasing vapes, "Parents monitoring their children's access to money."... "As parents - Not giving the children money to buy vapes."... "Being approachable for them if they are having difficulty through peer pressure"... "provide support and resources if their child is already vaping or smoking, including seeking professional help if necessary"... "Be aware of their children's activities and social circles"... "ultimately parents need to have the initial conversation"

6. Solutions and Prevention Strategies

Schools Role

9. Education and Awareness - School Programs

Schools are seen as important in educating students about the dangers of vaping through structured curriculum; "Educating our children on the dangers."..."Education in schools on the dangers of vaping."..."schools should be highlighting the negatives, how unhealthy and bad for you pumping unknown chemicals into your body is. Showing what addiction looks like and how it WILL ruin your life."

10. Monitoring and Supervision - School Monitoring

Policing at schools, including patrols of toilets and outdoor areas, to prevent vaping was also suggested: "Policing at school, patrols of toilets and recreational areas."... "better patrolling of schools during breaks and toilet monitors"... "Bathrooms should be alarmed/monitored at all times as well as outdoor areas"

11. Regulation and Legislation -No Vaping/Smoking Policy

Parents also suggested for schools to have a no vaping and no smoking policy on school grounds, to prevent vaping: "schools should have a no vape/no smoking policy in place within the school buildings & premises and anybody caught breaching these policies should be firmly dealt with."

Community Role

12. Community and Peer Influence - Role Models

Parents highlighting the importance of having non-smoking/vaping role models, both as parents and in the wider community, and the influence they have on young people: "As a non-smoker & non-vaper, keep being that example."... "Set a positive example by not smoking"

13. Accessibility Issues - Availability in Community

Parents raised concerns about the general availability and access to vapes within communities: "It should not be so easy for children to buy these products."

Collaborative Approach

14. Joint Responsibility - Collaborative Effort

Overall, there is an parents emphasised that preventing vaping requires a collaborative effort from government, schools, and parents, "Joint responsibility." "By working together, the government, schools, and parents can create a comprehensive and effective strategy to prevent and reduce vaping and smoking among young people."

Schools' View

Both primary schools and academies emphasised that engagement with parents or carers of children attending their schools regarding vaping should include regular emails or letters, in-person and virtual engagement sessions, either through parents' evenings or workshops. Schools also recommended resources, such as posters, leaflets or an online resource of information for parents, teachers and pupils.

Summary

The suggested solutions and preventative measures to reduce vaping and smoking among young people highlight an approach involving access restrictions, regulation of vaping promotion and advertising, stricter enforcement of age limits and a greater awareness of health consequences. Many young people and parents called for banning or heavily restricting access to vaping products, including making them prescription-only or increasing prices. There is a strong demand for limiting the visibility and marketing of vapes, especially towards younger audiences, with suggestion to reduce their appeal through bland packaging and eliminating flavours that attract children.

Enforcement of age restrictions and tougher consequences for underage vaping were emphasised, with suggestions for fines and stricter school policies. Health education in schools, alongside public campaigns and parental involvement, was also seen as critical to increasing awareness about the dangers of vaping. Schools and communities are encouraged to work collaboratively, with consistent engagement with parents and guardians through various channels, to ensure a unified effort in addressing the issue.

The overall consensus is that a comprehensive strategy, combining regulation, education and community involvement, is necessary to effectively prevent and reduce vaping and smoking among young people.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

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.