

## Creating a smokefree generation and tackling youth vaping.

Healthwatch Birmingham welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on creating a smokefree generation and tackling youth vaping. We are interested in improving access to health and social care through the feedback gathered from people across varying demographics.

Smoking and e-cigarette are one of the leading causes of avoidable ill-health, disability, and death in the United Kingdom. In 2022, approximately 6.4 million UK population aged 18 years and above smoked cigarette which is the lowest proportion of current smokers ever recorded since the records began in 2011 (Office of National Statistics, 2022). Within the United Kingdom territories, the lowest prevalence of current smokers is in England (12.7%), ahead of Scotland (13.9%), Northern Ireland (14.0%) and Wales, with the highest (14.1%) (ONS, 2022).

In Birmingham 13.6% of the population are currently smokers, however this drops to around 4.4% of 15-year-olds who are regular or occasional smokers. It is shown that the most deprived groups have the highest smoking rates and at risk populations include those with additional conditions and serious mental illnesses.

According to ASH (action on smoking and health) report on electronic cigarettes, it has been concluded that youths use of e-cigarettes is associated with an increased risk of cigarette smoking even though its popularity has grown among teenagers with no smoking history. However, e-cigarettes have been a major concern for the public health community since they can lead young people to start smoking cigarettes. As of March 2023, the proportion of children experimenting with vaping had increased by 50% on a yearly basis from one in thirteen to one in nine. The use of e-cigarette is most prevalent among those aged 16 to 24 years in the UK and has been on the increase (ONS, 2022).

### Health Risk

The use of e-cigarettes could potentially be harmful to one's respiratory system. Studies have indicated that youths who use e-cigarettes have twice the risk of having a persistent cough compared to those who do not use them. Through disruption of gas exchange and tissue inflammation, vaping can impair lung function. Moreover, it may reduce immunity, which raises the possibility of respiratory infections. The use of electronic cigarettes, or "e-cigarettes," permits the user to inhale nicotine vapour rather than smoke, which may influence brain development. In addition to exacerbating mood problems including despair and suicide ideation, this can aggravate cognitive and attention deficit issues. Adolescents are more likely than adults to be dependent on nicotine.



## Reasons for E-cigarette Uptake among Youths

There are numerous reasons for the uptake of the e-cigarette. More than half of non-smokers adopted the uptake of vaping to satisfy their youthful exuberance as a result of influence from their peers as compared to a quarter of individuals who have ever smoked. More so, some indulge in vaping because of the availability of different flavours such as fruit, candy and dessert options, which have sleek enticing packaging, and can be charged in a USB port. The idea that vaping is a safer option than smoking cigarettes is another factor attracting young people into the habit. Teenagers believe that vaping is healthier to smoking. It is important to remember that e-cigarettes are not risk-free, even if some research indicates that they may be less toxic than traditional tobacco products and that the effects of nicotine may be less detrimental.

Young people are also driven to vaping since e-cigarette businesses have successfully targeted this demographic with their marketing campaigns. Using eye-catching images, partnering with celebrities, and using social media influencers are some of these strategies. Companies have effectively drawn the attention of impressionable young minds by making vaping seem desirable and trendy. Social media platforms have a great deal of effect over youth in the current digital era. The prevalence of vaping among young people may be influenced by their exposure to vaping-related information on websites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Influencers—many of whom have a sizable fan base—may present vaping as a fashionable and appealing pastime, which increases the attraction of the habit.

## E-Cigarette as a Contributing Factor in Smoking Decline

According to the Annual Population Survey, the percentage of adults in England who smoke aged 18 and over decreased by 6.8 % between 2011 and 2021. This means that there were 5.4 million fewer smokers in 2021 than there were in 2011 (ONS, 2022). This is a result of the all-encompassing tobacco control strategy put in place, which has been linked to declines in the prevalence of smoking. These included minimum pack sizes, simple packaging, graphic health warnings on the front of packs, a prohibition on tobacco displays, and higher tobacco taxation. Thus, a variety of causes probably played a role in this decrease in prevalence.

It is noteworthy that the Smoking Toolkit Study has demonstrated a clear correlation between changes in the population's rates of quitting smoking and the prevalence of e-cigarette use. If the correlation is real, then using e-cigarettes to help people stop seems to have assisted between 30,000 and 50,000 more smokers in England year since 2013 (Jackson et al., 2023). Furthermore, evidence from a randomised controlled trial found that vaping was nearly twice as effective as the nicotine-replacement therapy in helping smokers quit in a Stop Smoking Service setting in England. This has shown concrete evidence that the electronic cigarette containing nicotine quickens smoking quit rates compared to those without nicotine.



## Response to Youth Vaping

The UK government declared in 2019 that it wanted England to be "smoke-free" by 2030. A population is considered "smoke-free" if just 5% of people smoke. The government of England announced that it will release a new tobacco control strategy. This involves non-smoking alternatives, such as electronic cigarettes. Maggie Throup, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Care, stated in response to a written inquiry on June 23, 2022, that "the government's regulatory framework aims to maximise the opportunities for smokers to use vaping as a tool to quit."

The government has set aside £70 million for local stop smoking programmes and support in each of England's local authorities, supporting the country's efforts to gradually phase out smoking. In order to offer one-on-one and group stop smoking sessions, accurate information and guidance, and convenient and reasonably priced access to quit aids such as skin patches, inhalators, nasal and mouth spray, chewing gum, and lozenges, stop smoking services and support have been developed.

## Addressing Youth Vaping through Education

When addressing youth vaping, it's imperative to exercise patience, refrain from criticising, and be forthright and truthful. Easy conversation and mutual receptivity in a secure, compassionate, and understanding environment should be prioritised. This needs to be done through comprehensive factual engagement with younger people through a variety of methods.

Helping young people make their own well-informed decisions on the matter is an excellent approach. Educate them on how the tobacco industry uses clever marketing and glitzy graphics to subtly influence people. Work directly with them if they are struggling with a nicotine addiction before beginning to get them the support they require.

An educational intervention on vaping could play an important role in reducing vaping initiation and promoting vaping cessation. Educational institutes can guide students towards making healthy choices and pinpoint the health consequences of vaping using effective resources. The FDA created the Vaping Prevention and Education Resource Centre assisting learning about youth vaping and to discuss the risks and effects with students in the US.

## Progression from Vaping into Shisha

According to the vaping sector, many people have been able to stop traditional smoking. That may be true for some older smokers, though young people are more likely to adopt vaping without prior cigarette use. Vaping more frequently is associated with a higher risk of more subsequent initiation of combustible cigarette smoking such as Shisha. However, the hazardous substances and byproducts that smokers are exposed to when using shisha are also present in far larger concentrations



for users, which could have more detrimental impacts on their health. Smoking shisha increases the risk of lung illness, cancer, infections, and other diseases. Furthermore, it is believed that the effects of hookah smoke on the cardiovascular system are similar to those of ordinary cigarettes due to their similar toxicant and chemical profiles.

## Conclusion

Taking the above into account, vaping has the potential to impact the health of young people negatively leading to poor health outcomes. In addition, leading to increased use of health services. The impact on the environment of vaping has been documented. Many of these vapes, especially single use vapes, are made from plastic and have become a constant feature of our public spaces. We believe that a whole systems approach needs to be in place, including education & regulation as well as powers and resources for enforcement of the legislation.

We look forward to seeing the outcome of this consultation and the continuation of this work.

Yours Sincerely,

Healthwatch Birmingham

