



START
VAPING
STOP
SMOKING



Vaping versus Smoking:

A guide for NHS staff on successfully getting patients to quit smoking through vaping

Introduction to this guide

More than half a million adult hospital admissions were due to smoking in 2019-20, some 10% higher than a decade earlier (Office of National Statistics)^[1].

The University of East Anglia^[2] will conduct trials in NHS hospital trusts to encourage patients with smoking illnesses to look at vaping as a way to help them quit their habits. The communication of accurate, evidence-based information is key for a successful transition from combustible tobacco to e-cigarettes.

This simple guide has been compiled by the UK Vaping Industry Association (UKVIA) to support healthcare professionals with up-to-date information (found within PHE's online guidance on e-cigarettes), so that you can provide accurate facts to your patients. It will provide patients the reassurance and confidence to be able to break away from smoking. We have included common questions that smokers ask when they are considering vaping and other quit methods. Evidence sources are included where relevant.

Good luck with supporting your patients who smoke on their quit journey.

For more information visit: www.ukvia.co.uk/healthcarehub

^[1] ONS, Adult Smoking Habits in the UK [\[Link\]](#)

^[2] University of East Anglia, Starter vape packs to be handed out in hospitals, [\[Link\]](#)

Your common vaping questions answered

Q: How does vaping compare to smoking in terms of risk?

A: Vaping isn't completely risk free, but it poses a small fraction of the health risk of smoking. According to PHE, in its vaping evidence review, it is at least 95% less harmful than smoking^[3]. Cancer Research UK also states that evidence so far indicates that e-cigarettes are far less harmful than smoking as they don't contain tobacco or involve combustion.

Q: Why is smoking so much more harmful than vaping?

A: Cigarette smoke contains thousands of distinct constituents, many of which are toxic or carcinogenic. It is these toxic by-products of combustion that are responsible for smoking-related death and disease. Vaping does not involve burning tobacco and doesn't produce tar or carbon monoxide.

E-cigarettes do not burn tobacco leaves but use electronic heat sources to aerosolise a nicotine-containing liquid that is then inhaled by the user. This provides nicotine without burning tobacco, thus significantly reducing exposure to the harmful chemicals found in tobacco smoke.

Although nicotine is the reason people become addicted to smoking, it is the thousands of other chemicals contained in cigarette smoke that cause almost all of the harm.

Q: How does vaping work?

A: Vape devices run on batteries and heat up e-liquids into vapour, which is inhaled and exhaled from the mouthpiece of the device. E-liquids are made up of handful ingredients, including nicotine. The concentration of nicotine in the e-liquid can be varied, allowing vapers to decide the right strength for themselves.

^[3] PHE, 2015 E-cigarette Evidence Review, [\[Link\]](#)

Q: Is it easy to quit using vaping?

A: Vaping is one of the most effective quit aids available, helping around 50,000 smokers quit a year^[4]. The experience of completely switching to e-cigarettes varies for different people and can depend on how many cigarettes they smoked per day. Steps that will support patients include visiting a vape shop, where they will receive support on what strength of e-liquid is most appropriate.

In the beginning, patients may find that they cough when inhaling vapour which is common. Vapour is different to smoke but with the support of a vape shop or vaping friends this should pass.

Q: How can I ensure a successful quit using vaping?

A: The UKVIA [Vaping to Quit Smoking Guide](#) highlights how patients who smoke can choose the best devices, nicotine levels and flavours to give them the best chance of a successful quit. Visiting local stop smoking services or by downloading the Smoke Free App.

Q: Where can I find out more about vaping and other alternatives to smoking to help me quit?

A: There are many organisations providing advice to smokers looking to quit. It's well worth taking a look at a range of sources, including the likes of Stop Smoking Services, Public Health England, the Smoke Free app, Smokefree NHS, the UK Government website, pharmacies and vape retail stores. The UKVIA smoker education campaign, VApril also has a dedicated website at www.vapril.org and a section offering advice and information to smokers at www.ukvia.co.uk.

Q: What if I don't take to vaping, what are the other alternatives?

A: Those looking to quit smoking will need to determine what's the best method or combination for them. There are other quit methods such as gum, patches, heat not burn and other nicotine replacement therapies (NRTs) that people use successfully.

^[4] PHE, 2021, Seventh report on vaping in England, [\[Link\]](#)

Some may also combine these tools with vaping. However, vaping is now widely recognised as the most successful tool to quit smoking and consistently studies show it to be much more effective than other NRTs.^[5]

Q: If I start vaping can it cause harm to my families and friends in the same way as passive smoking?

A: Existing evidence suggests that exhaled vapour is not harmful to others and the risk to bystanders is low to very low according to the Committee of Toxicology. This is in direct contrast to secondhand smoke which is harmful.

Q: I've seen a lot of negative publicity about vaping – I'm not sure whether to believe it or not?

A: Public Health England stated in its 2020 version of its Vaping Evidence Review that perceptions of harm from vaping among smokers are increasingly out of line with the evidence^[6]. There have been a lot of misleading stories about vaping in the media, none more so than the news two years ago in the US about an outbreak of serious lung injuries which were reportedly caused by vaping. However US authorities identified that vitamin E acetate, added to cannabis products, were the “primary cause” of the outbreak. Vitamin E acetate is banned from UK regulated nicotine-containing e-cigarettes. Likewise, there have been reports that vaping causes the lung condition, called ‘popcorn lung’. Cancer Research UK categorically says on its website that there is no link between the condition and vaping^[7].

To date there have been no conclusively confirmed deaths in the UK from vaping legal products and recently the Royal College of Physicians released a major report calling for the UK government to promote electronic cigarettes via a mass media campaign^[8].

^[5] A Randomized Trial of E-Cigarettes versus Nicotine-Replacement Therapy, Peter Hajek et. al., 2019, [\[Link\]](#)

^[6] PHE, 2021, Seventh report on vaping in England, [\[Link\]](#)

^[7] Cancer Research UK, 2019, Does vaping cause popcorn lung? [\[Link\]](#)

^[8] RCP, 2021, Smoking and health, [\[Link\]](#)