



**TO:** All Principals, for sharing with parents, guardians and staff  
**FROM:** Dr Paul Kavanagh, HSE Tobacco Free Ireland  
**RE:** Vaping among children and young people  
**DATE:** 29/05/2023

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Vaping is an emerging risk to the health of children and young people. The purpose of this communication from the HSE is to better inform and support parents and guardians to protect children and young people from the harms of vaping.

Vaping means using an electronic cigarette (E-cigarette). E-cigarettes are battery-powered devices. They heat nicotine mixed with flavourings and other chemicals to create an aerosol that the user inhales.

#### **Trends in smoking and vaping among children and young people**

Parents, guardians, teachers and schools play an important role in protecting children and young people from smoking. Smoking among children and young people aged 10-17 years decreased from almost 1-in-4 in 1998 to 1-in-20 in 2018. This is a huge achievement, which puts children and young people on a course for good health throughout their lives.

Vaping has become more common for adults in recent years. Almost 1-in-20 people aged 15 years and older in Ireland vape. Most of these people smoke or have smoked in the past.

Vaping has also become more common among children and young people. Data from 2018 shows that about 1-in-10 children and young people aged 12 to 17 years old used an E-cigarette in the last 30 days. Data focused on 16 year olds, found 1-in-5 were using E-cigarettes in 2019 which is double what it was in 2015. More up-to-date Irish data is due to be published later in 2023. Based on these recent trends, we expect this will confirm a further increase in E-cigarette use among children and young people in Ireland.

#### **Risks of harm caused by vaping among children and young people**

Vaping is harmful for children and young people for many reasons:

- E-cigarette use has been linked with acute harms including poisonings, burns, fractures, lung injury and asthma exacerbations.
- Early evidence links E-cigarettes use to cardiovascular and respiratory tissue damage.
- E-cigarettes often contain nicotine, which is addictive and leads to dependence.

- Children and young people are especially vulnerable to the effects of nicotine on their developing brains including nicotine addiction, mood disorders, and lowering of impulse control.
- Other drugs such as alcohol, synthetic cannabinoids, and opiates can be added to E-liquids and consumed through vaping.
- Finally, children and young people who use E-cigarettes are more likely to start smoking compared to those who never used E-cigarettes.
- Longer-term health effects of vaping are uncertain at this point in time.

### **Regulating to better protect children and young people from the harms of vaping**

In 2022, the drafting of the Public Health (Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill was approved by government. The Bill will ban the sale of E-cigarettes to those under the age of 18 and strengthen regulation of the retail of tobacco and E-cigarette products. We expect the Bill to be brought forward into the legislative programme soon.

### **Support for parents, guardians and teachers to protect children and young people from the harms of vaping**

Parents, guardians and teachers have been in touch with the HSE for advice on how to protect children and young people from the harms of vaping.

Including E-cigarettes in substance misuse policies and procedures is an important step which many schools have taken to protect children and young people.

A range of resources for schools from the HSE Education Programme were updated and enhanced to include new information on E-cigarettes. Links are provided at the end of this document.

The HSE encourages parents and guardians to discuss vaping with their children and young people.

A 'QUIT4Youth' Resource has recently been developed for local HSE Health and Wellbeing services to support them in their response to the needs of young people who smoke and use E-cigarettes. The HSE is working on further resources to support parents and guardians.

We will monitor this situation and continue to develop our response, resources and supports. We will continue to work with parents and guardians, schools, the Department of Education, Department of Health and all stakeholders to ensure we protect children and young people from the harms of smoking and E-cigarettes.

### **Links to information and resources -**

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/resources/e-cigarette-resources.html>

Yours Sincerely



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