

Factsheet on e-cigarettes (ECs)

Health impact

- We do not know the long term health effects of e-cigarettes/vapes (ECs) yet because they are relatively new products
- However, ECs do not contain the tar, carbon monoxide or levels of toxic carcinogenic substances which are harmful to human health that cigarettes do
- [Public Health England](#) estimates that using ECs is at least 95% safer than smoking cigarettes
- So while ECs may not be risk-free, they are much less harmful than cigarettes
- Public Health England also states that there have been no identified health risks to people exposed to secondhand EC vapour

Guidance on use

- The guidance from [Public Health England](#), [Royal College of Physicians](#), [Action on Smoking and Health](#), [Cancer Research UK](#), [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#), [British Medical Association](#) and others is that:
 - ECs can be a useful tool for smokers to use to help cut down or quit smoking
 - Stop smoking services and health professionals in general should not discourage smokers from using ECs for this purpose

Regulation

- ECs are [regulated](#) as consumer products under the UK Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016.
- Aspects that are regulated include the strength of the nicotine, the way ECs can be advertised, the size of the e-liquid containers, the need for specific labelling (e.g. of ingredients) and health warnings, and banning of additives like vitamins and caffeine
- It is illegal to sell ECs to people under the age of 18
- No ECs have been approved as licensed medicines yet so they cannot be prescribed under the NHS

Effectiveness in helping smokers to quit

- [Several observational studies](#) have found that people using ECs are more likely to successfully quit smoking than people using other or no products
- A recent [randomised controlled trial](#) found that 18% of people using an EC were smokefree after 1 year while 8% of those using nicotine replacement therapy were
- ECs are the [most common quitting aid](#) used by smokers in the UK

Costs

- According to [Cancer Research UK](#), smoking cigarettes costs around twice as much as using ECs

Prevalence of use

- [Nationally](#), around 6% of adults use ECs; rates in Hackney are likely to be similar
- Nationally, 4% of current EC users have never smoked, up from 2% in 2014. 52% of current EC users are ex-smokers, 44% are current smokers

Pregnant women

- The Smoking in Pregnancy Challenge Group has produced [an infographic](#) on ECs for pregnant women, and [a guidance document](#) for healthcare professionals on the use of ECs in pregnancy. The guidance states that, while licensed NRT products are the recommended option, if a pregnant woman chooses to use an e-cigarette to help her quit smoking and stay smokefree, she should be supported to do so.
- In May 2019 the Royal College of Midwives put out [a position statement](#) with similar guidance, and also stating that vaping should continue during breastfeeding if it is helpful for quitting smoking and staying smokefree.

Young people

- [Nationally](#), 15% of 11-18 year olds have tried vaping and less than 2% vape more than once a week
- Nationally, of 11-18 year olds who have never smoked, 5.5% have tried vaping and 0.1% vape more than once a week
- In the UK, there is no evidence that use of ECs is leading to an increase in young people smoking
- Our recommended messages for young people about vaping:
 - ECs can be a useful tool to help adults to quit smoking;
 - However, it is illegal for those under 18 to buy ECs;
 - Vaping may be harmful to young people;
 - And while ECs can help adults to quit smoking, it is recommended that non-smokers of all ages do not take up vaping for recreational purposes

The Hackney context

- Our [Stop Smoking Service](#) is EC friendly; if someone wants to quit smoking using a vape they can do so at our Stop Smoking Service (however the individual will need to purchase their own EC as none are currently available on prescription)
- Six vape stores in Hackney are [certified partners](#) of our Stop Smoking Service

Some useful links for more information

- NCSCT [e-cigarettes training for healthcare professionals](#)
- ASH [briefing on e-cigarettes](#)
- Hackney Stop Smoking Service [guidance](#)
- Public Health England [evidence review of e-cigarettes](#)
- NHS Smokefree [information on e-cigarettes](#)
- Smoking Toolkit Study [latest statistics and reports on e-cigarettes](#)

E-cigarette Myth Busting

- **Myth:** Using e-cigarettes is as harmful to your health as smoking cigarettes.

Fact: Public Health England estimates that using e-cigarettes is at least 95% safer than smoking cigarettes. E-cigarettes do not contain the tar, carbon monoxide or levels of toxic carcinogenic substances that cigarettes do.

- **Myth:** Nicotine is what causes the harmful health effects of smoking.

Fact: Nicotine causes minimal risk of harm to health; it is just what causes people to be addicted to smoking. It is the tar, carbon monoxide, and over 70 carcinogenic chemicals in cigarettes that cause the health harms.

- **Myth:** E-cigarettes cause popcorn lung.

Fact: Popcorn lung is caused by breathing in high levels of diacetyl. In the past diacetyl was detected in some e-liquid flavourings (but at levels hundreds of times lower than in cigarette smoke). Now diacetyl is banned as an ingredient from e-cigarettes and e-liquids in the UK.

- **Myth:** E-cigarette use is very high in young people and is leading to an increase in smoking.

Fact: 15% of 11-18 year olds have tried vaping and less than 2% vape more than once a week. Of 11-18 year olds who have never smoked, 5.5% have tried vaping and 0.1% vape more than once a week. In the UK, there is no evidence that use of e-cigarettes is leading to an increase of smoking in young people.

- **Myth:** E-cigarettes catch fire and explode.

Fact: When incidents of e-cigarettes catching fire or exploding have been investigated it has been found that these occurred because people used the wrong charger, left the e-cigarette charging for too long, carried a spare lithium ion battery in a pocket with keys or coins so it short circuited, etc. If the e-cigarette is used as advised they do not catch fire or explode.

- **Myth:** E-cigarettes are not regulated. We do not know what is in them.

Fact: E-cigarettes are regulated as consumer products under the UK Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016. Aspects of e-cigarettes that are regulated include nicotine strength, advertising, e-liquid container size, banning of additives, and compulsory labelling (e.g. of ingredients) and health warnings.

- **Myth:** E-cigarette vapour is harmful to bystanders.

Fact: Unlike cigarettes, e-cigarettes do not produce any side-stream vapour, only exhaled vapour. And unlike secondhand smoke, there is no evidence as yet that secondhand exposure to e-cigarette vapour has any harmful health effects for bystanders.

- **Myth:** Very high levels of aldehydes, such as formaldehyde, are found in e-cigarettes.

Fact: It has been shown that high levels of aldehydes are only found in e-cigarettes when they are overheated. In this situation (called 'dry puff'), a very strong, very unpleasant taste is produced. People who vape immediately recognise this taste and stop vaping; therefore they are not exposed to the high levels of aldehydes.