



Position Statement on Vaping amongst Children and Young People

For education establishments, professionals and others working with young people who vape

Both nationally and locally in Shropshire, we are hearing concerns around children and young people vaping. Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Board have tasked partners to look into evidence and develop communications around this for frontline practitioners, carers, parents and young people.

This position statement summarises the current evidence and understanding of risk associated with vaping amongst young people under 18 years of age, including key messages for those working with young people who vape. This is the first in a series of communications, further updates will be shared in due course.

A Shropshire Stance

Shropshire Health and Wellbeing Board are concerned about the level of underage vaping within the County.

National data has reported an alarming increase in children and young people who vape; intelligence from professionals in Shropshire reflects a similar position locally. We do not want the decline in smoking rates being replaced by an increase in vaping, whether that is nicotine or non-nicotine based vapes. Whilst there is currently no specific research focusing on the health impact of vaping on young people's development and long-term respiratory system impacts; evidence suggests, and we are all agreed, that vaping is not for children and the safest, healthiest option is not to vape or smoke.

We are concerned as we know many young people are attracted to vapes by the colourful packaging and the appealing nature of designs and flavours. These features may be prioritised by young people above concerns for their health or in relation to product safety. Vapes can be purchased online often with relative ease and are more challenging to regulate. There has been a large rise in sales of non-compliant vapes (with risks around product safety requirements such as chargers and batteries). This is compounded by worrying indications that the supply of vapes may be linked to child exploitation and serious organised crime.

As such, we are committed to develop local understanding and build awareness of risks associated with vaping, address common misconceptions, and promote best available evidence to enable young people and those that work with them to make informed decisions on vape use. We support the Local Government Association's call for action to central government for vapes to be in plain packaging, be kept out-of-sight, for mandatory age-of-sale signage on vaping products and a ban on free samples as tools that can help achieve this. We promote a message that vaping is not for children and the safest, healthiest option is not to vape or smoke.

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E-cigarette or Vape?

Using an e-cigarette is known as vaping. Vaping devices (referred to as "vapes") usually contain nicotine, which is the addictive chemical in cigarettes, and allow the user to inhale nicotine in a vapour rather than smoke.



Vaping is not completely risk free, particularly for people who have never smoked and should not be presented as an appealing activity to the wider non-smoking population. The Local Government Association (LGA) has calling for stricter regulation of vapes to tackle the growing cases of children getting hold of them¹. This approach is fully supported by Shropshire Public Health.

Vapes are useful for reducing harm to adult tobacco smokers, by encouraging smokers to use vapes as an alternative to tobacco and to aid quitting smoking altogether.

There are many different types of e-cigarette, including vape pens, vape bars, pod devices, mods, and cigalikes. They can be rechargeable or disposable. Some vapes are marketed with packaging designs and flavours that could be more appealing to children and young people.

Popular brands currently include Elf Bar and Geekvape.

Officially licensed vaping products are tightly regulated through legislation for safety, nicotine strength and ingredients to ensure they meet appropriate UK standards. Shropshire Council's Trading Standards department is responsible for monitoring shop sales within the Local Authority area.

Current Evidence of Vaping amongst Children and Young People

There is currently no specific research around the impact of vaping on the health of children and young people. Relatively little is known, however, about the potential effects of chronic vaping on the respiratory system in the longer term.

The best available evidence to date on the use of vapes is based on devices being used as a tobacco smoking cessation tool for adults, where there is evidence of reduced harm in the short and medium term, compared to tobacco smoking.

There are, however, higher risks of exposure to harmful substances from vaping compared with not using a vape or smoking at all.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities evidence update report² (OHID 2022) notes that based on outcomes from six studies, longer exposures to second hand heavy sustained vaping were associated with significant increases in nicotine or potentially harmful substances.

It is best for adults not to vape or smoke around babies and children.

The true impact of vaping on respiratory health will manifest over the coming decades, but in the interval a prudent and time tested recommendation remains to abstain from consumption of inhaled nicotine and other products (BMJ, 2022)³.

Use and Awareness

It is recognised there is local concern regarding numbers of children and young people using vapes.

¹ [Vapes need to be 'out-of-sight and out-of-reach' to tackle underage sales – LGA | Local Government Association](#)

² [Nicotine vaping in England: an evidence update including health risks and perceptions, September 2022 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Impact of vaping on respiratory health | The BMJ](#)



There are currently limited studies on this, however a national study conducted by (ASH Y, 2022⁴) reported that most young people who had never smoked are also not currently vaping (ASH Y, 2022).

Roughly 16% of young people aged between 11 and 17 years vape based on the most recent research from ASH⁵. However, the proportion of young people who do regularly vape (more than once a week) has increased by a higher rate between 2021 to 2022 compared to previous years.

The likelihood of trying or those currently using vapes increases with age and smoking status, with the key ages being 16, 17 and particularly 18 years (although use can occur earlier).

Although not all vaping products contain nicotine, the national ASH survey⁶ from 2021 of 11 to 18 year olds indicated the majority used devices containing nicotine. In a 2021 survey of 16 to 19 year olds by the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC) Youth Survey⁷, it was identified that over half of those who vape felt a little or very addicted (although this was lower than those who tobacco smoked in the same age group). In addition, just under half (45%) reported experiencing urges to vape daily or more than daily.

Locally, Shropshire's da and Finish Group is reviewing local CYP vaping data to provide a better understanding of the situation within Shropshire.

Legality of Vaping amongst Children and Young People

It is illegal for a person to sell a 'nicotine inhaling product', which is the legal term used to describe nicotine vapes and their associated products, to anyone under the age of 18. Where a sale of a nicotine vape is made to an under-18 year old, the owner of the business and the member of the staff who made the sale can be held responsible.

It is also illegal for an adult to buy or attempt to buy a nicotine vape on behalf of someone who is under the age of 18; this is known as 'proxy purchasing'. It is the buyer and not the business who commits the offence under these circumstances.

Unhelpfully, there are currently no age-restriction controls in relation to the sale of vapes that do not contain nicotine despite not vaping still being the safest and healthiest option. It is also currently not illegal for minors to smoke or vape. Children should not be excluded from school for vaping or smoking, unless it is associated with other disruptive behaviour which justifies this.

The national ASH survey (2022)³ identified that shops are the main source of purchasing vapes (including newsagents and supermarkets) however, many young people purchase them online or are given vapes by peers. There is also concern that some parents have rewarded their children with purchasing vapes, despite the legal and health issues that vape use can present.

The Trading Standards Role

As part of its regulatory enforcement role, Trading Standards is able to undertake covert enforcement visits to premises in response to information received or complaints made against any

⁴ [Nicotine vaping in England: 2022 evidence update summary, 2022. Accessible from: Nicotine vaping in England: 2022 evidence update summary - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ ASH Smokefree GB survey of 11-18 year olds 2013-2022: [Use-of-e-cigarettes-among-young-people-in-Great-Britain-2022.pdf \(ash.org.uk\)](#)

⁶ [Use-of-e-cigarettes-among-young-people-in-Great-Britain-2022.pdf \(ash.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ As stated in OHID Report (2022): [Nicotine vaping in England: an evidence update including health risks and perceptions, September 2022 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)



businesses that vapes are being sold without ID challenge. Anyone selling a vaping product to a person under 18 will be subject to a full criminal investigation by Trading Standards with a view to legal action being taken where required.

It is important to reduce the accessibility and appeal of nicotine products to children. Young people under 18 years should be asked where they got their vape (or cigarette) from. Anyone who has information that may help identify retailers/online sellers who are selling vapes to anyone under the age of 18 is able to provide this information, in confidence, to Shropshire Council's **Trading Standards** by emailing ts.enforcement@shropshire.gov.uk or by contacting the **Citizens Advice Consumer Service** on 03454 04 05 06 or by visiting their website <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/contact-us/>.

There is currently a legal loophole which allows free samples of vaping products to be given away to people of any age. There are concerns that this loophole is being exploited by less scrupulous individuals/businesses and, whilst this is not widely understood to be happening across Shropshire, Trading Standards is aware of a few instances. Concerns over this loophole have been communicated nationally to Government and it is anticipated that legislative provisions to address this will be introduced when Parliamentary time permits.

To help stop underage children and young people from being able to access vapes, the LGA (2022)⁸ has called for vapes to be in plain packaging and kept out-of-sight behind the counter, for mandatory age-of-sale signage on vaping products and a ban on free samples being given out to people of any age. Shropshire Public Health is in full support of this approach to reduce the appeal of vapes to children and reduce underage access to vapes.

Exploitation Concerns

Vapes can be one of the tools that are used by criminals to lure young people into criminal activity, similar to methods used with tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. This can be heightened by the strong demand for vapes amongst young people leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

Alongside this, vapes offer some young people the opportunity to make a lot of money, especially in schools where they can be resold - sometimes for twice their value. In Shropshire, some young people have done this on behalf of adults or other peers, enabling avenues into schools - and worryingly a wider market. Young people may struggle to break away from this lucrative practice, which leaves them vulnerable to other types of exploitation.

In Shropshire organised criminal gangs, drug dealers and exploited young people involved in County Lines have used vapes as a way of enticing new members as colourful and vibrant vapes are attractive to young people. This can be an effective way to get someone interested in substances and a cheap way to buy a young person's interest, whilst making a lot of money quickly for a relatively low risk.

Signs of exploitation can include receiving gifts and rewards (including drugs, alcohol, food, and clothing), increased secretiveness particularly around phone use, use of drugs or alcohol perhaps without the means to afford this, a decline in mental health or possession of a weapon.

For concerns about child exploitation in Shropshire please refer to the [Child Exploitation Tools and Pathways](#) and report concerns to Compass (contact details towards the end of this document), in line with the [Multi-agency Referral: Reporting concerns \(MARF\) \(procedures.org.uk\)](#)

⁸ [Vapes need to be 'out-of-sight and out-of-reach' to tackle underage sales – LGA | Local Government Association](#)



Local Action on Vaping amongst Children and Young People

Following publication of the 2022 Khan Report (Making Smoking Obsolete)⁹, Shropshire’s Health and Wellbeing Board have tasked partners to review evidence and communications around the issue of vaping amongst children and young person.

To help understand the local position, dedicated work is ongoing to;

- Review available data and intelligence on the local prevalence of vaping amongst children and young people, informed by the ASH National Survey methodology and approaches adopted elsewhere
- Develop appropriate messaging in relation to vaping amongst children and young people for professionals, practitioners, parents and carers, to support those working with children and young people who vape. This is in the context of emerging national resources currently in development and which will inform a local approach and campaign based on the key messages to communications aimed both at professionals and children and young people directly.

Key Messages for Action

Message It is illegal to sell nicotine vapes to or buy them for anyone under 18 years

- Action** Ask where they got from the vape from;
- **Shop** – inform Trading Standards
Shropshire Trading Standards at ts.enforcement@shropshire.gov.uk
Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 03454 04 05 06 or by visiting their website <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/contact-us/>
 - **Parent/Guardian** – reminder that it is illegal to buy vapes for anyone underage and a conversation about health risk would be recommended
 - **Another adult or peer** – consider if there could be risk of exploitation

Message Vaping is not for children

- Action** Raise awareness with underage people of the unknown long-term risks of vaping

Message If you don’t smoke, don’t start vaping – the healthiest option is to not smoke or vape

- Action** Raise awareness that vaping is not risk free and the unknown long-term risks of vaping. The current evidence is based on the impact of adults using devices as a quit smoking tool.

Message Growing concern of the links between vaping and exploitation of children and young people

- Action** Refer to the [Child Exploitation Tools and Pathways](#)
Report concerns to Compass on details below in line with the [Multi-agency Referral: Reporting concerns \(MARF\) \(procedures.org.uk\)](#)

⁹ [The Khan review: making smoking obsolete - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)



It may be effective to talk to young people about purposeful targeting by the vaping industry and criminals to manipulate them into vaping without care about health impact

Additional Contacts and Resources

Contacts

Report of illegal sale of vaping products to those aged under 18 years

Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice Portal
[Reporting to Trading Standards - Citizens Advice](#)

Concerns about potential exploitation and grooming of young people

Concern about a child or young person
Call 0345 678 9021
or 0345 678 9040 if out of office hours
[Children's social care and health | Shropshire Council](#)

Concern about potential exploitation in your community

- If anyone is at risk or immediate harm – Call 999
- Share non-urgent information – Call 101 or visit “Tell Us About” section at www.westmercia.police.uk
- Report anonymously – Call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or visit www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Links to Online Resources for Further Guidance and Information

- [ASH guidance for school and colleges](#)
- [ASH resources on youth vaping - ASH](#)
- [ASH factsheet: use of e-cigarettes among young people in Great Britain in 2022](#)
- [OHID Nicotine vaping in England: 2022 evidence update main findings](#)