



25 February 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

Recently we have seen an increase in reports that students may be using e-cigarettes (otherwise known as 'vaping') across local schools and in the community. We take this issue seriously due to the negative health effects vaping can have on young people, who are often unaware of the risks associated with the practice.

Vaping is the act of inhaling a vapour produced by an e-cigarette or electronic vaporizer. The vapour can contain nicotine and other substances and may expose users to chemicals and toxins which are harmful to health. The devices are small and can be easily hidden in a pocket or bag. The most popular disposable vapes resemble large USB sticks or highlighter pens.



The vapes pictured above contain 5% nicotine, which is the equivalent of a strong pack of cigarettes. Nicotine is addictive and can harm brain development and impact learning, memory, and attention.

The Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008 was amended in 2015 to define e-cigarettes and e-cigarette accessories to be separate from tobacco products. The Act makes many of the provisions that apply to tobacco products also apply to e-cigarettes and e-cigarette accessories. The Act makes it an offence:

- to sell e-cigarettes and e-cigarette accessories to persons aged under 18
- for adults to buy e-cigarettes and e-cigarette accessories on behalf of persons aged under 18

The NSW Department of Education has advised schools that students should not bring e-cigarettes or e-cigarette accessories onto school premises or use them during school-based activities. Consistent with Department of Education and school policy: **vaping, selling or being in the possession of e-cigarettes will result in disciplinary action that may lead to a student being suspended from school.**

We are asking parents to be informed about this ongoing concern and to speak to their children about making positive decisions. Additional information to support parents and students can be found at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/tobacco/Pages/electronic-cigarettes.aspx>

E-Cigarettes

What you need to know as parents.

If you, or a parent you know, is concerned about the risks of electronic cigarette use in teenagers, the following information provides you with the facts.

WHAT ARE E-CIGARETTES?

Also known as covies, stigs and vapes an e-cigarette is in simple terms a device that heats a flavoured liquid (popular flavours include; strawberry, watermelon, peach and creme brulee) to an aerosol which can be inhaled. The device can be disposable (often allowing for up to 600 inhalations) or it can be reusable by refilling the device with e-liquid or a pod (containing e-liquid). Recent data shows an increase in use of e-cigarettes over the past three years, with one in five students aged 16–17, trying e-cigarettes.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

E-cigarettes produce an aerosol by using a battery to heat a liquid. This liquid is sometimes called “e-juice,” “e-liquid,” “vape juice,” or “vape liquid.” The liquid used in e-cigarettes is made up of flavours, chemicals and often contains nicotine.

Users inhale e-cigarette aerosol into their lungs. Bystanders can also breathe in this aerosol when the user exhales it into the air.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

E-cigarettes come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They can be as small as a USB and even look like one, they can also look like pens, highlighters or cigarettes.



WHY ARE THEY UNSAFE/RISKY/DANGEROUS?

E-cigarette liquid is made up of different chemicals. These chemicals can include:

- Nicotine (although illegal without a prescription in Australia, many disposable devices that youth are using contain nicotine.)
- Flavorings such as diacetyl, a chemical linked to a serious lung disease
- Volatile organic compounds
- Cancer-causing chemicals
- Heavy metals such as nickel, tin, and lead

Studies have also shown that kids who use e-cigarettes are more likely than their peers to go on to smoke cigarettes.

Effects of nicotine on youth:

- Nicotine can harm the developing teenage brain.¹ The brain keeps developing until about age 25.
- Using nicotine as a teenager can harm the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood, and impulse control.¹
- Each time a new memory is created or a new skill is learned, stronger connections – or synapses – are built between brain cells. Young people’s brains build synapses faster than adult brains. Nicotine changes the way these synapses are formed.
- Using nicotine as a teenager may also increase risk for future addiction to other drugs.¹

WHAT CAN I DO AS A PARENT?

The KEY is talking about e-cigarettes with your child, preparing yourself with the facts and role modelling with a smoke and e-cigarette free environment. KEY considerations for talking about e-cigarettes:

K: Know the facts or where to find them from a reputable source

E: Engage on the topic in a relaxed and easy way. Use the cues around you, a note home from the school, a person using a device, a story on the news as the way into the conversation and the way to keep talking about it ongoing.

Y: You know your child, communicate with them in ways that work for you and allow you to provide them with the right information to make healthy decisions.

Important note – if you are concerned that your child may be experiencing nicotine withdrawal please speak to your pediatrician or doctor.

For advice on existing evidence based methods to quit call the Quitline on 13 7848 or find online support here: www.cancercouncil.com.au/cancer-prevention/smoking/quitting-smoking/

More information on e-cigarettes can be found here:

www.cancercouncil.com.au/cancer-prevention/smoking/electronic-cigarettes/

THE CRITICS' CHOICE

The health effects of tobacco smoking and e-cigarette use

Effect of tobacco smoking on your health:

- Smoking is the main cause of **preventable** death and disease in Australia!
- Smoking is linked to **40+ diseases**, including lung cancer, liver cancer, emphysema and eye and mouth diseases.
- When you smoke, extremely harmful chemicals enter your body and can reach your heart, brain and go everywhere your blood flows.
- Smoking affects how you look and feel.

Effects of e-cigarette use on your health:

- E-cigarettes contain chemicals that **haven't been tested for safety** when inhaled into the lungs.
- E-cigarette makers don't list all their ingredients and it can be hard to find out what they are. Some e-cigarettes contain nicotine even when they are labelled "nicotine free".
- Nicotine is **highly addictive** and can harm your brain development.
- Studies have shown that young people who use e-cigarettes are **more likely to smoke** and become addicted to cigarettes in adulthood.

Smoking can:

- Stop your lungs growing properly and make you less fit.
- Give you tooth decay and sore or bleeding gums.
- Make you wheeze or trigger an asthma attack.
- Cause addiction to the drug nicotine.

Using e-cigarettes can:

- Make you wheeze or trigger an asthma attack.
- Make you moody, anxious and irritable.
- Expose your lungs, body and brain to harmful chemicals.
- Cause addiction to the drug nicotine.

Smoking and e-cigarettes affect your brain:

Your brain is particularly sensitive to the effects of nicotine. Your brain is still developing until you are about 25 years old, so if you use nicotine your brain may not be able to properly develop. This means that you are more likely to develop anxiety and mood disorders.

What does all this mean for you?

Smoking or using e-cigarettes:

- is bad for the health of your body, lungs and brain
- costs a lot of money and can mean you miss out on doing fun activities
- exposes you to addictive and unknown substances
- gives you yellow teeth and unhealthy gums.

By choosing not to smoke or use e-cigarettes you are setting yourself up for a healthier and happier life!