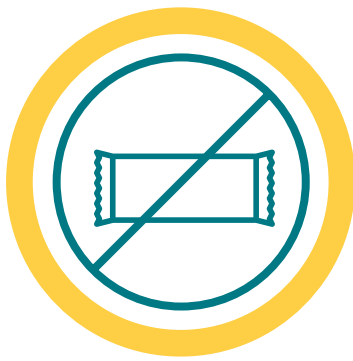




Prevention toolkit for youth workers: E-cigarettes and other nicotine containing product







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Acknowledgements

This document was originally developed in 2024 by the HSE Tobacco Free Ireland programme. This project was supported by the National Youth Council of Ireland, Foróige, the Western Region Drug and Alcohol Task Force, the HSE Health Promotion Departments from Dublin and Northeast, Dublin and Midlands and the HSE Education and Training Programme. This resource was reviewed, revised and updated in 2026.

A special thank you to the youth workers from Leitrim Community Training Programme, North Connaught Youth and Community Services, Foróige, Youth Work Tipperary, Information & Education Programmes Dublin Northeast, Kerry Diocesan Youth Service, Bishopstown/Cork Foyer, Sligo Community Training Centre, Girls Guide Ireland and Limerick Youth Service, who took time to participate in focus groups and review the content. Their input prior to, and feedback during development helped to frame the content and steer the direction of this resource.

Introduction

This toolkit has been designed for those working with young people in a youth setting but the information and lesson plans could also be adapted for the school setting. The purpose of this toolkit is to provide accurate and up-to-date information on nicotine, e-cigarettes and other nicotine delivery systems, such as nicotine pouches.

This resource explains what nicotine is; the devices available to deliver nicotine; the health effects that they can have, in particular on a young person; the environmental impact of their use; why we should be concerned about a young person vaping and using other nicotine containing products; and how to address this issue and have a conversation on this topic with a young person.

This toolkit can be adapted to fit into your current suite of health behaviour programmes or used to start a conversation with a young person or group of young people. It has been developed as a prevention tool. However, it can also be used with young people who are currently using any nicotine delivery system.

How to use this resource

There are two sections to this resource

Section 1 has information on nicotine, e-cigarettes and other nicotine delivery systems.

Section 2 has a selection of activities covering different aspects of vaping and nicotine addiction.

These activities can be delivered:

- As part of an existing health promotion programme,
- As a stand-alone session, or
- To act as a conversation starter.



Section 1

Information on nicotine and nicotine delivery systems

What is nicotine?

Nicotine is a highly addictive chemical that occurs naturally in tobacco. All tobacco products, nicotine pouches and most e-cigarettes contain nicotine.

It is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream, giving a person a temporary high or buzz, but this feeling goes away very quickly. Eventually if a person keeps using nicotine, they become addicted. This can happen very quickly, within just a few days of starting to use one of the products that contain nicotine. Some research suggests that it is as addictive as heroin, cocaine or alcohol. Nicotine also affects the central nervous system, potentially leading to withdrawal symptoms like irritability and anxiety, and can cause gastrointestinal issues like nausea and stomach cramps.

The effects of nicotine

Nicotine can have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of those using nicotine containing products.

Nicotine is particularly harmful to young people, negatively impacting brain development. Human brain development continues until the age of 25. Nicotine use during adolescence and young adulthood has been associated with lasting cognitive and behavioural problems.

Some of the physical and mental health effects of nicotine are listed below.

Nicotine exposure causes:

- increased heart rate
- increased blood pressure
- sleep problems
- heart problems are caused because nicotine causes a narrowing of the arteries and increases the risk of blood clots
- problems with attention, learning and impulse control in young people
- mental health difficulties, such as anxiety.

What is a nicotine delivery system?

A nicotine delivery system is any device or item that delivers nicotine to the body. There are a variety of these available on the market, including tobacco cigarettes, roll your own tobacco, e-cigarettes, synthetic oral nicotine pouches and hookah. There are new products and delivery systems being developed all the time.

NOTE: When referring to any of the nicotine delivery systems in this document, this **does not** include nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). NRT is an effective, safe and evidenced based medication that is used to support people to quit smoking. These medicines do contain nicotine but at a low level and just enough to relieve cravings and withdrawal symptoms. They are usually used for 12 weeks reducing the dose over this time.

What are e-cigarettes?

E-cigarettes are electronic devices that produce an aerosol by heating a liquid, often called 'e-liquid'. This e-liquid usually contains nicotine, which is an addictive drug also found in regular cigarettes and other tobacco products. The e-liquid used in e-cigarettes also contains flavourings and other chemicals. Users breathe this aerosol into their lungs. This is commonly referred to as 'vaping'. Anyone who is near a person who is vaping also breathes in this aerosol.

There are many different types of e-cigarettes, see next page for more information.

What is in an e-cigarette aerosol?

The e-cigarette aerosol that people breathe in can contain harmful substances.

Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine, heavy metals, flavourings, volatile organic compounds and ultrafine particulate matter. E-cigarettes are consumer products and are not regulated in the same way as a drug or medical device.

The level of nicotine varies. A simple guideline is that around 15 puffs from a vape with an average nicotine level could be equivalent to one cigarette. The 600-puff disposable vapes for example, popular with young people, contain the equivalent nicotine levels of approximately 40 cigarettes.

Here is a list of some of the substances that can be found in e-cigarettes:

- Nicotine, which is highly addictive. It releases dopamine to the brain creating a temporary sense of pleasure
- Volatile organic compounds which are usually human-made chemicals that are used and produced in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals
- Ultrafine particles
- Cancer-causing chemicals
- Heavy metals, such as nickel, tin and lead
- Flavourings and chemicals linked to serious lung disease.



Different types of e-cigarettes

Some e-cigarettes are made to look like regular cigarettes, cigars or pipes. Some look like pens, USB sticks and other everyday items, while others have a tank-style shape with a mouthpiece. There are many kinds of e-cigarettes available to purchase in Ireland today. The most common types are:

Disposable vapes

Disposable vapes are bought fully charged and are already filled with e-liquid. They cannot be re-charged or refilled and cannot be used once the battery and e-liquid are used up. In recent years, disposable vapes have become popular in Ireland, particularly among young people. Some of the most common brands include Lost Mary, Elf Bar and Vuse.

Many disposable vapes now also come with a re-chargeable battery. This means that they won't fall under legislation that will ban single use disposable vapes. This also means that they can be used for longer, allowing for a much larger number of puffs per vape.

Vape pens

These vapes can be recharged and can be used multiple times. The e-liquid is held in a refillable cartridge.

Modifiable tanks

These e-cigarettes can be recharged and used multiple times. The battery power can be increased or decreased through controls on the battery. These controls tell the e-cigarette to make more or less aerosol.

E-cigarettes and other drugs

E-cigarettes can also be used to deliver other drugs, including cannabis.

E-cigarettes have been used to deliver tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the primary psychoactive substance in cannabis. Hexahydrocannabinol (HHC) is chemically similar to THC, and this has also been used in vapes.

HHC is a new drug known as a semi synthetic cannabinoid. It was sold in shops and online as vape pens, edibles and oils. It may have effects similar to cannabis and can be harmful, especially for young people. In July 2025, HHC and a number of other drugs were re-classified as illegal drugs.

For more information on this, please see www.drugs.ie.

What are nicotine pouches?

Nicotine pouches are often referred to as snus. They do not contain tobacco, but contain synthetic nicotine, sweeteners, fillers, other chemicals and added flavours. The pouches are placed between the lip and gum, and the nicotine is absorbed into the bloodstream through the gums.

Nicotine pouches can contain high levels of nicotine, which leads to nicotine addiction. We are still learning about the risks of nicotine pouches, but they may include:

- problems with your gums
- mouth ulcers
- dry mouth
- nausea and stomach problems
- nicotine poisoning



Nicotine pouches are not yet covered by the same laws as tobacco products and currently it is legal to sell them online or in retail stores to anyone regardless of their age. There are no restrictions on advertising, promotion or sales. This means they are easier for young people to buy and use.

We are seeing an increasing number of young people using nicotine pouches. These pouches are very discreet and often you would not know that someone is using them.

Other nicotine delivery systems

There are a range of devices that deliver nicotine. Activity 2 in the resources section, will provide young people an opportunity to explore and understand these other devices. In addition to the multiple brands and variations of e-cigarettes that are available, the devices below also deliver nicotine and are used by young people.



Cigarettes

Cigarettes contain tobacco, nicotine and thousands of chemicals, of which over 60 we know can cause cancer. Tobacco smoke is toxic and because of the nicotine content, cigarettes are highly addictive.



Loose tobacco for making roll your own (RYO)

This is loose tobacco that allows a person to roll their own cigarettes. Contrary to what some people believe, loose tobacco is as harmful as the tobacco in regular cigarettes.



Heat-not-burn device

'Heat-not-burn' also known as 'heated tobacco' or 'smokeless tobacco' products are electronic devices in which a cigarette-like stick which contains tobacco is inserted. The tobacco is heated to a high temperature, without setting it alight, creating smoke, which the user inhales. They contain nicotine, additives and are often flavoured. These devices are illegal in Ireland.



Snus

Snus is an oral tobacco product. It is consumed by placing a pouch of powdered tobacco leaves under the lip for nicotine to be absorbed through the gums. The sale of snus is illegal in the European Union, except for Sweden. However, it may be available on the black market.



Hookah and Shisha

A hookah is a device that is used to smoke moist tobacco or non-tobacco (herbal) products known as shisha. The term hookah is one of many names for this smoking device. Hookahs are also commonly known as water pipes. Shisha is the flavoured tobacco made up of shredded tobacco leaf combined with molasses, honey or dried fruit.



Snuff

Snuff is a type of smokeless tobacco. It is finely cut or powdered, cured tobacco that can be dry, moist, or packaged/portioned in sachets. Dry snuff is loose, finely cut or powdered tobacco that is typically sniffed through the nostrils. The oral moist version of snuff is illegal in Ireland.

New and emerging products

The industry is constantly introducing new products to the market, many of which have yet to reach Ireland. The products named below are just some examples of what is available in other countries. New products could be available in the future.

Nicotine gel

A type of nicotine product that is rubbed on the skin and then absorbed into the bloodstream. They contain several chemicals including nicotine, humectants such as propylene glycol and a variety of preservatives.



Dissolvable nicotine products

These dissolvable products include lozenges (not to be confused with the Nicotine Replacement Therapy lozenge which is a regulated medicine), oral use strips or sticks, and some may look like sweets. Most of these products dissolve in the mouth and do not require spitting or discarding of the product. They contain nicotine along with a number of other additives and chemicals.



Who is using these products?

The number of people who vape and use nicotine products has increased significantly in Ireland in recent years. There has been an increase in vaping among children and young people. In addition to this, we are also beginning to see young people use nicotine pouches. This is something, which has been seen in many other countries. It is a cause of concern for children and young people, their parents, their communities and health professionals.

E-cigarettes

Our most recent figures on e-cigarette use by children and young people are from the 2024 Tobacco Free Research Institute Ireland (TFRI) study of more than 5,000 15 – 18-year-olds. The figures show that 1 in 5 young people are current e-cigarette users, and 2 in 5 young people have tried e-cigarettes.

Nicotine pouches

For the first time we have figures on the number of young people using nicotine pouches. The 2024 Tobacco Free Research Institute Ireland (TFRI) study found that 1 in 20 young people currently use nicotine pouches, and 1 in 10 have tried nicotine pouches.

Adult use of e-cigarettes

Our most recent figures on e-cigarette use for adults is from the 2025 Healthy Ireland Survey.¹ These figures show that 8% of adults use e-cigarettes. This compares to just 3% of adults in 2016. Use is highest amongst young people, particularly those aged 15 – 24 years at 18%.

The Healthy Ireland survey is completed every year. To find the most recent Healthy Ireland data, please check out: <https://www.gov.ie/en/healthy-ireland/collections/healthy-ireland-survey-documents/>.



¹ https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/2b9f909b/Healthy_Ireland_Summary_Report_2025_Web_07.11.2025.pdf

What are the health risks of vaping and using other nicotine containing products?

Risk of nicotine addiction

Youth use of recreational nicotine in any form is unsafe. It is highly addictive and children and young people are especially vulnerable. Nicotine addiction happens very quickly, and the risk of long-term addiction is very high.

Using nicotine can train the brain to be more easily addicted to other drugs like cocaine.

Risk to mental health

Nicotine use can have a negative impact on mental health, particularly for young people. Several studies have linked vaping to increased depressive symptoms, perceived stress, anxiety disorder symptoms and suicide related behaviours.

Nicotine can cause mood swings and make it harder to control impulses. It also affects memory, concentration, self-control, attention and learning, especially in the developing brains of young people.

People may experience nicotine withdrawal when they stop using, or if they are in a situation where they cannot use a nicotine product. Common symptoms of withdrawal include anger; frustration and irritability; difficulty concentrating and studying; feeling tired or groggy, and having trouble sleeping.

Risk to physical health

Nicotine also has physical effects on the body. People who smoke, vape or use products containing nicotine, especially in the initial stages of use may experience any combination of:

| | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Nausea | Vomiting |
| Diarrhoea | Cold, clammy skin |
| A rapid pulse | Dizziness |
| Fainting | Headaches |
| Anxiety | Increased sweating |

Other health risks

Children and adults have been poisoned by swallowing, breathing or absorbing the e-liquid contained in e-cigarettes. There have been instances where unintended injuries have been caused by batteries exploding and causing fire. Some well conducted studies have shown how, for young people with asthma, a very common condition in this group, vaping leads to an exacerbation of this illness.

E-cigarettes can contain substances that harm the body. These include tiny particles that reach deep into the lungs as well as chemicals that are known to cause cancer.

Children and adults have been poisoned by swallowing, breathing or absorbing the e-liquid from e-cigarettes.

Long-term risks of these products

Many of the nicotine products named in this booklet, in particular e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches are still relatively new. It will take several years, maybe even decades, before we know everything about their health effects. For example, we know that e-cigarettes have an effect on the heart and lungs while they are being used and shortly afterwards. However, it will take large studies of people who vape over many years for us to know if this leads to serious lung, heart disease or cancer. There is evidence now however that young people who vape are more likely to begin smoking conventional cigarettes.

Nicotine pouches may carry fewer health risks than tobacco or e-cigarettes but there are cardiovascular risks for people using pouches with high quantities of nicotine. There is growing concern over the damage nicotine pouches have on dental health. Users have reported gum irritation and inflammation, lesions in the gums, and reduction in saliva production. Dentists have reported increased gum disease and bone loss among those using nicotine pouches.

The HSE recommends that young people do not vape, use nicotine pouches or any of the other new and emerging nicotine products.

E-cigarettes and the risk of starting to smoke tobacco cigarettes

The Health Research Board (HRB) conducted a review into e-cigarette use among young people. It found that young people who vaped were three to five times more likely to start smoking tobacco cigarettes than those who have never vaped. This, in turn could potentially lead to serious harm and tobacco related disease.²

Over the past 15 years or more, Ireland has made huge inroads to reducing smoking prevalence across the population, particularly among youth. E-cigarettes in particular have the potential to act as a gateway to tobacco smoking and derail the progress made towards delivering a Tobacco Free Ireland. E-cigarettes, nicotine pouches and new and emerging nicotine products have the potential to introduce nicotine addiction to the current and future generations of young Irish children.

² <https://www.hrb.ie/publication/electronic-cigarette-use-and-tobacco-cigarette-smoking-initiation-in-adolescents-an-evidence-review/>

The environmental impact of tobacco and nicotine products

Improperly discarded tobacco and nicotine products are harmful to the environment. These products contain toxic and non-biodegradable substances that pollute the surrounding ecosystem and can harm wildlife. Cigarettes are frequently cited as one of the world's most polluting products, causing widespread, long-term harm to the environment from production to disposal. However, as e-cigarette and other nicotine product sales continue to rise, their contribution to environmental waste is growing.

E-cigarettes introduce plastic, nicotine salts, heavy metals and flammable lithium-ion batteries into waterways, soil and to wildlife. Toxic chemicals found in e-cigarette liquids include lead, acetaldehyde, formaldehyde, and nicotine and when e-cigarettes are thrown away, these contents can leak into the surrounding waterways and environment.

Like cigarette butts, e-cigarette waste won't biodegrade even under severe conditions. E-cigarettes left on the street eventually break down into micro plastics and chemicals that are a threat to the environment and human health. Disposable vapes in particular, are increasingly ending up as litter in Ireland and are harmful to the environment. E-cigarettes pose a fire risk primarily due to their lithium-ion batteries, which can overheat, catch fire, or explode if damaged, overcharged, or exposed to metal objects. This can happen due to faulty manufacturing, improper charging, or damage from being crushed or punctured.

Snus and nicotine pouches contain tobacco or nicotine powder in a sachet made of cellulose fibres. While the cellulose fibres that make up pouches eventually decompose, they are not fully biodegradable and therefore pose an environmental risk. These products are often discarded improperly and contribute to environmental litter. In addition, they contain chemicals like nicotine that can leak into the surrounding environment and harm wildlife if they ingest the pouches.



How would a person know if they were addicted to these products?

Here are some signs to watch out for:

- feeling that you need to vape or use a nicotine product after waking up in the morning
- feeling anxious or irritable due to cravings
- using the product without thinking about it
- having trouble concentrating or sleeping
- thinking about using the product throughout the day
- continuing to use the product even after learning about the health risks.

What does the HSE recommend as a stop smoking aid?

The HSE advises anyone who wants to stop smoking to use evidence-based medications that are safe and known to work. An example of this is nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). The HSE does not recommend the use of e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches or other non-medicinal nicotine products as a stop smoking aid.

HSE stop smoking services can provide support to anyone who wants to quit smoking.

For some people despite being advised of the evidence in terms of what works best to support them, they wish to use a product which we don't recommend such as e-cigarettes, the following advice should be given:

- These products are not licensed stop smoking aids. They are consumer products. There is some regulation in place to protect consumers of e-cigarettes, less so for some of the other nicotine containing products. This consumer legislation is not the same as that of a licensed drug or medical device. In Ireland, the Health Products Regulation Authority (HPRA) are the authority responsible for regulation of medical devices. These products are not currently classified as a medical device and are not regulated by the HPRA.
- There are a lot of things we don't know about the safety of e-cigarettes. Even less is known about nicotine pouches and the other nicotine containing products, as new and emerging products are introduced to the market.

What cessation services does the HSE provide?

The HSE provides safe, effective and clinically sound stop smoking services, which are free and easy to access across the country. These services have been designed for people who smoke cigarettes. We think that these supports may also help those people who wish to stop vaping and possibly other nicotine containing products. There is good evidence to show that advice and support can help people address health behaviours like smoking, vaping, drinking and drug use.

More robust evidence is needed regarding the minimum standards required to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based stop vaping/other nicotine containing products service. The development of such a service requires dedicated additional resources in terms of research, staff and funding.

For now, the stop smoking services are trying to meet demand for stop vaping care. Where capacity allows, some services are providing behavioural support to those who wish to stop vaping or stop using other nicotine containing products, similar to the support they provide to those who wish to quit smoking.

If you or someone else is worried about vaping or using other tobacco and nicotine products, they can visit our websites:

<https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/vaping/> – for information on vaping or

<https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/other-products/smokeless/> – for information on smokeless nicotine and tobacco products.

There is also the Quit4Youth group programme for young people. This is a group stop smoking and/or vaping programme designed specifically for young people attending a youth service. For more information on this programme, please contact your local stop smoking service:

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/stop-smoking-services/>.

The current legal position in relation to e-cigarettes and other nicotine containing products

E-cigarettes

There are specific regulations with which e-cigarettes must comply. This legislation is enforced by the HSE National Environmental Health Service (NEHS), who undertake a targeted inspection and sampling programme, testing that e-cigarettes meet the nicotine concentration and volume of liquid limits. These regulations set the minimum safety and quality legal requirements that e-cigarettes must comply with, for example:

- The nicotine concentration must not exceed 20mg/ml or 2%, which must be legally declared on the packaging of the e-cigarette.
- The volume of nicotine containing liquid in the tank of an e-cigarette must not exceed 2ml.

Where products are found to be in breach of the legislative requirements, the HSE NEHS has a range of legal powers and sanctions available to deal with non-compliant product and economic operators that are not in compliance with legislation. These powers include withdrawal of the products from the market, destruction orders and/or prosecution of the economic operator. The NEHS conducts a number of inspections annually. The enormous volume of products and retail premises, as well as online sales, makes oversight of this area challenging.

In 2023, the NEHS found that almost 90% of the retailers and importers of e-cigarettes inspected were selling e-cigarettes that did not comply with legislation. As a result, notices were served to detain the non-compliant e-cigarettes found during inspections. 3,371 e-cigarettes were detained and had to be destroyed during 2023 and 2024.

In 2025, the NEHS alerted the public to stop using three different e-cigarette products as they were wrongly labelled as containing 'no nicotine' when they did in fact contain nicotine.³

Each year the NEHS also carries out a programme of test purchase inspections to check that retailers are not selling nicotine inhaling products or tobacco products to children. During an inspection where a retailer sells to a child the NEHS takes a prosecution to the District Court. The NEHS publishes at regular intervals details of convictions in relation to tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products.

It is now a legal requirement for retailers of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products to apply to the HSE for a licence to sell these products. The NEHS enforces this legislation. For more information and to apply visit hse.ie/tobacco-nicotine-licence.

³ <https://about.hse.ie/news/hse-warns-people-to-stop-using-three-e-cigarette-products-containing-nicotine-but-labelled-as-having-no-nicotine/>

New legislation

New laws will ban the sale of single use disposable vapes and introduce plain packaging to bring them in line with cigarette packaging. There will also be a restriction on the flavours available for sale. This will include the prohibition of flavour descriptors and language other than basic flavour names. Point of sale displays and advertisements within shops will also be banned, except in specialist shops.

Vape tax, 2025

On 1st November 2025, a new tax on e-liquids was introduced. This so called 'vape tax' applies at a rate of 50c per millilitre of e-liquid, excluding 23% VAT.

It applies to vape products containing nicotine, as well as those that do not. This tax has seen the price of a standard 2ml disposable vape – a popular product among younger people – go from €8 to more than €9. However, vape refills have had more extreme increases. A standard 10ml vape-liquid refill more than doubled in price, from €6 to €12.50 (when the tax and VAT are factored in).

This levy is aimed at addressing the rising prevalence of vaping, particularly among younger people.

Other nicotine containing products

Unfortunately, there is currently little regulation with regards to other nicotine products. There is support within Government to restrict or ban products such as nicotine pouches for those under 18. The regulation of these new and emerging products is being discussed at EU level, with an awareness of their potential appeal to young people.

However, in 2025 the Chief Medical Officer announced that the Department of Health is examining a ban on nicotine pouches as part of measures to reduce the use of nicotine among children and young people. Belgium, France and the Netherlands have all introduced bans on nicotine pouches, while other EU countries are introducing or considering tighter regulation around the products.



Unfortunately, there is currently little regulation with regards to other nicotine products. There is support within Government to ban products such as nicotine pouches for those under 18, but the focus is currently on e-cigarettes.

The Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act 2023

The Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act 2023 forms part of a comprehensive suite of reforms to reduce smoking and its harmful effects, informed by national and international considerations in line with the recommendations in Tobacco Free Ireland. The Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act was signed into law by the President on the 13th of December 2023.

Provisions within the Act:

- introduce a licensing system for the retail sale of tobacco and nicotine inhaling products.
- prohibit the sale of tobacco products from self-service vending machines, temporary or mobile units and at events for children.
- prohibit the sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products by persons under 18 years and prohibit the sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products to persons under 18 years.
- introduce additional enforcement powers and sanctions including fixed penalty notices for retailers convicted of offences.
- prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products from self-service vending machines, temporary or mobile premises, and at events for children.
- prohibit the advertisement of e-cigarettes on public transport, in cinemas, and near schools.

The Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act was signed into law by the President on the 13th of December 2023.



Section 2

Resources and activities

The resources and activities in the following pages will help you to engage with young people on the topic of e-cigarettes and other nicotine containing products.

The activities can be adapted to suit your current health behaviour programmes or can simply be used to start a conversation with a young person or a group of young people.

Most of these resources have been developed with a focus on prevention. It is likely that many young people using your service, are already using or have experimented with these products. These activities can also be used to support awareness of the risks associated with nicotine experimentation, as well as supporting behaviour change and the development of healthy attitudes.

You may wish to focus on a specific nicotine containing product for some of the activities. This may be because a specific product is of particular concern for your group. In most of the activities, where it says 'nicotine containing products' you can substitute with vapes, nicotine pouches or another specific nicotine product as appropriate.



ACTIVITY 1: General points for discussion with young people

Having read the information provided in Section 1, you can use the following discussion points below to start a conversation:

- E-cigarettes are consumer products. There is some regulation in place to protect consumers but not the same quality and safety system as is in place for a licensed drug or medical device.
- People who do not smoke, use e-cigarettes or any other nicotine containing product should not start.
- Smoking tobacco is extremely dangerous and, compared to this, e-cigarettes and nicotine containing products are likely to be less harmful. They are not harm-free though, and there is some uncertainty at the moment regarding their long-term health impact. People who do not smoke should not start using e-cigarettes and nicotine containing products. People who do smoke and want to quit should use safe and effective supports like NRT.
- Nicotine is extremely addictive and use during adolescence can disrupt the development of the brain which can impair attention, learning and impulse control, and elevate the risk for long term mood disorders and addiction to other substances.
- E-cigarettes and nicotine containing products should be strictly regulated and, most importantly, must be kept away from children.
- The acute effects of e-cigarettes include poisonings, burns, blast injuries, lung injury and asthmatic attacks. Some of the chemicals in e-cigarettes are thought to cause tissue and cell damage and some contain agents that may cause cancer in the long-term. The long-term data on e-cigarette risk will take decades to unfold.
- E-cigarettes on their own are associated with increased risk of cardiovascular diseases and lung disorders and adverse effects on the development of the foetus during pregnancy.
- Adolescents who use e-cigarettes are three to five times more likely to start smoking tobacco cigarettes compared to those who never used e-cigarettes.
- Dual use of both e-cigarettes and conventional tobacco cigarettes is more harmful than smoking tobacco cigarettes alone.
- Nicotine is highly addictive. Both tobacco products and nicotine containing products pose risks to health, and the safest approach is to not consume either.
- There are challenges in safely disposing of e-cigarettes and accessories. E-cigarette cartridges can leak and expose children, adults, pets and the environment to nicotine and other chemicals.
- Disposing of nicotine pouches also poses a risk to the environment.
- Nicotine addiction continues to pose a serious public health risk, especially for young people. Nicotine pouches share multiple characteristics with e-cigarettes that have been shown to lead to significant youth usage, including high concentrations of nicotine, youth-appelling flavours, a significant presence on social media, and they are easy to conceal.

ACTIVITY 2: What's in an e-cigarette?

Delivery method:

Discussion and exploration.

Aim:

To know what chemicals are in an e-cigarette and explore the possible harmful effects of vaping on health.

Instructions:

Present a copy of the image opposite and ask the group if they know any of the chemicals found in an e-cigarette.

Once the group have contributed some answers or if they don't know any of the ingredients, present a copy, as below, of an e-cigarette with a list of some of the chemicals found in an e-cigarette.



- Volatile organic compounds
- Heavy metals such as nickel, tin and lead
- Flavourings and chemicals linked to serious lung disease
- Cancer causing chemicals
- Ultrafine particles
- Nicotine



Can you name any of the chemicals found in vapes?



Ask the group:

- Do you know what these chemicals are?
- Follow this up by saying:



The aerosol vapour that a person breathes in from a vape and then exhales can contain harmful and potentially harmful substances. Here's what is in some of these substances.

Use the information below to provide detail and information on these chemicals.⁴

- Nicotine: a highly addictive substance that has a negative effect on the developing brain of a young person, for example, problems with attention, learning, mood and impulse control.
- Volatile organic compounds: these are usually human-made chemicals that are used and produced in other household products. Examples of these are:
 - acrolein – used as a weed killer and is linked to irreversible lung damage
 - diethylene glycol – a toxic chemical used in antifreeze that is linked to lung disease
 - propylene glycol – a synthetic, colorless, odourless and viscous liquid alcohol widely used as a solvent, humectant (moisture retainer), and preservative in food, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals
 - cadmium – a toxic metal found in traditional cigarettes that causes breathing problems and disease
 - benzene – a volatile organic compound that is found in car exhausts.
- Ultrafine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs and cause damage.
- Carcinogens: These are chemicals that cause cancer. Those found in e-cigarettes include:
 - acetaldehyde which is used primarily in the production of herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, pharmaceuticals, flavours, fragrances, dyes, plastics and synthetic rubber
 - formaldehyde which is used in the production of fertiliser, paper, plywood, and some resins and household products, such as antiseptics, medicines, and cosmetics. Exposure to formaldehyde can irritate the skin, throat, lungs and eyes.
- Heavy metals, such as nickel, tin and lead.
- Artificial flavourings and chemicals linked to serious lung disease.

⁴ <https://www.lung.org/quit-smoking/e-cigarettes-vaping/whats-in-an-e-cigarette>

Follow up with this information:

It is difficult to know exactly what's in each vape because the variety of products are immense, the list of ingredients is extensive and there is very little quality control and testing of products to confirm that what is described in the contents is actually within the product. For example, when tested some vapes marketed as containing zero percent nicotine have been found to contain nicotine and some vapes have been found to contain higher doses of nicotine than displayed on the label or packaging.



In January 2025, the Environmental Health Service within the HSE issued another safety alert regarding excessive nicotine concentrations in 4 products. The products included vapes produced by McKeese, ADADA, The Crystal Pro and Savage Vape.

In May 2025, another safety alert was issued asking the public to stop using 3 different vape products as they were wrongly labelled as containing **'no nicotine'** when they did in fact contain nicotine. The brands involved this time included McKeese, The Crystal Bling and JNR Crystal.

This was not the first time that safety notices have been issued for some of these brands. In 2023, the HSE issued a safety alert about five flavoured vapes produced by the McKesse brand, because they contained more than the permitted concentration of nicotine (20mg/ml).

Now start a conversation using some or all of the questions below to support this conversation:

- Are you surprised that there are so many chemicals in an e-cigarette?
- Does this change your perception of e-cigarettes?
- Nicotine is the addictive substance in e-cigarettes that gets you hooked. Do you know how much nicotine is in your e-cigarette? How can you be sure?
- What about nicotine pouches, do you know how much nicotine is in them?
- What effect do you think nicotine has on a young person's brain?
- What do you think are the effects of vaping on your body right now?
- For anyone who is using nicotine pouches, what effects do you think these might have on your mouth, body and brain?
- What do you think might be the long-term effects of vaping or using any nicotine product on your body?
- Did you know that if you start vaping, you are more likely to start smoking compared to someone who has never vaped? Does this worry or concern you?

Additional information for facilitator

Whether a person smokes tobacco, vapes, uses nicotine pouches or any other nicotine containing product they are still consuming nicotine. The younger a person tries nicotine, the greater the risk of addiction. The brain of a young person is more vulnerable to the effects of the addictive substances than that of a fully developed adult brain.

Nicotine can:

- disrupt brain development
- lead to problems with attention, learning, mood and impulse control
- interfere with long-term cognitive functioning
- increase the risk of various mental and physical health problems later in life
- train the brain to become more easily addicted to other drugs like cocaine, etc., because it disrupts dopamine and endorphin production.

E-cigarette use has also been linked with poisonings, burns, blast injuries and an increased risk of lung infection and asthmatic attacks. Some of the chemicals in e-cigarettes are thought to cause tissue and cell damage and some are agents that may cause cancer in the long-term.⁵

In addition to this, research has shown that young people who use e-cigarettes are three to five times more likely to start smoking tobacco cigarettes compared to those who never used e-cigarettes. Most e-cigarettes have higher levels of nicotine than regular cigarettes/tobacco.⁶

⁵ <https://www.hrb.ie/publication/harms-and-benefits-of-e-cigarettes-and-heat-not-burn-tobacco-products-a-literature-map/>

⁶ <https://www.hrb.ie/publication/electronic-cigarette-use-and-tobacco-cigarette-smoking-initiation-in-adolescents-an-evidence-review/>

ACTIVITY 3: Nicotine delivery systems

Delivery method:

Discussion and demonstration.

Aim:

To know the different nicotine delivery systems.

Instructions:

Divide into groups of 4 or 5.

Give each group a copy of the images, numbered 1 to 10, of different nicotine delivery systems. You may choose to photocopy them and laminate them so that they can be passed around the group and used again.

Start a conversation about these devices/products to explore what the young people know about them. Use the questions below to help start this conversation:

- Can you name each of these devices?
- Have you used them or seen other people using them?
- Can you explain how each or any of them work?
- Do you know what is in these devices/products?

Here are the names of each of the items in the images, 1 to 10:

1. Cigarettes
2. E-cigarettes/vapes
3. Nicotine toothpick
4. Loose tobacco for making roll your own (RYO or rollies)
5. Heat-not-burn (also known as heated tobacco) device
6. Nicotine pouch (this is commonly referred to as snus)
7. Hookah
8. Tobacco snus
9. Snuff

For more information on the devices/products above, see Section 1.

NOTE: Nicotine pouches are often referred to as 'snus'. The snus product displayed in this activity is tobacco snus and is not legally available in Ireland.

What to say:

These are just some of the current nicotine delivery systems that we know of. New ones are constantly being developed by tobacco companies to keep people using their products.

Section 2

Suggested discussion points:

Question: What do these products have in common?

Response: All of these products are designed to deliver nicotine to the human body.

Question: What is the problem with nicotine?

Response: Nicotine is highly addictive. See page 6 for more information.

Question: Why do you think the tobacco industry makes and promotes an increasing range of nicotine delivery systems?

Response: To create nicotine addiction so that people need to continue buying and using the products, which increases companies' profits.



1. Cigarettes



2. E-cigarettes/vapes



3. Nicotine toothpick



4. Rolling tobacco (Rollies)



5. Heat-not-burn also known as heated tobacco



6. Nicotine pouch



7. Hookah



8. Tobacco snus



9. Snuff

Can you name any of these products that contain nicotine?



1.



2.

3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.

ACTIVITY 4: Understanding nicotine addiction

Delivery method:

Video followed by discussion.

Aim:

To understand nicotine addiction and to explore our own attitudes to addiction.

Instructions:

Play the video on nicotine addiction.

You can access this video using the QR code or click on the link:

<https://youtu.be/gJwhcGAuZC4>

Pause the video at 00:43



Suggested questions:

- What products or devices can be used to consume nicotine? Refer back to the various products that were identified in Activity 3 and in Section 1 of this book.
- What might be the signs that a person is addicted to nicotine? How might they act? How might they feel?
- How do you think the tobacco and nicotine industry promotes its products on TV, in music videos and in films?

Play the video again. Pause it at 2:08

Suggested questions:

- What is dopamine? What does dopamine do in the body?
- How does nicotine affect the brain?
- Describe how nicotine addiction happens?

Play the video again. Pause it at 3:15.

Suggested questions:

- What effects does nicotine have on the body?
- What particular harm can nicotine do to adolescents?
- What are the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal?
- Do you know how people can manage nicotine withdrawal when they are trying to quit smoking/vaping/using other nicotine products?

Play the video again to the end.

Suggested questions:

- Was any of the information in the video new or surprising to you?
- Do you think if other young people knew about the impact of nicotine on their brain, that this would affect their choice or decision to use nicotine containing products? Why/why not?
- What other things might cause young people to decide against using these products?

Additional information for facilitator:

Dopamine

Dopamine is the chemical in the body that acts on the brain to give you feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. It plays a role in controlling memory, mood, sleep, learning, concentration and other functions. It is sometimes referred to as the “feel good” chemical in the brain.

Nicotine stimulates the release of dopamine. When a person consumes a product containing nicotine, dopamine is released and the person has an almost instant feeling of pleasure or relaxation. However, because of the way that nicotine works in the body, this feeling does not last long. The effects wear off in just a few hours creating the desire or need for another nicotine hit.

Useful tips for dealing with cravings:

Below are some useful tips for dealing with nicotine withdrawal. Share these with young people who may be experiencing nicotine withdrawal. Better still, offer a couple of these as suggestions and ask them if they can think of something that would work for them.

- Individual cravings usually pass in three to five minutes.
- Deal with cravings by using the ‘4 Ds’:
 - D**istract yourself by focusing on something else
 - D**elay doing anything about the craving until it passes
 - D**eep breaths: Take 20 deep breaths
 - D**rink a cold glass of water or fruit juice

Use one or some of the following to help practice the 4 Ds

- call a friend
- step outside for some fresh air
- chew some chewing gum
- eat a healthy snack like an apple
- do something physical like going for a run or walk, or doing some stretches
- do a short relaxation exercise
- listen to music, read, sew, do jigsaws or puzzles

Don’t forget:

- Remind yourself that these feelings are temporary – they will go away
- Congratulate yourself for coping with life without vaping or using a nicotine pouch
- Ask others to understand and be patient
- Do things that make you feel good

ACTIVITY 5: Health, social and financial implications of using nicotine containing products

Delivery method:

Discussion.

Aim:

To explore the health, financial and social impact of vaping and/or other nicotine containing products.

Instructions:

Lead a group discussion on the health risks, financial issues and social aspects of vaping or using other nicotine products to reinforce different reasons why those who currently use these products might want to quit.

NOTE: If you have already explored the health risks of vaping and nicotine, you may choose to omit these questions from the discussion. You should, however, remind the group of these risks and explore any connections between the three topics.

Use the questions below to facilitate this discussion.

Allow young people space and time to think about and answer the questions.

Health questions:

1. What chemicals do you think are in these products/vapes/nicotine pouches?
2. What are the health risks associated with vaping or using nicotine containing products?
3. What are the short term and/or long-term effects of vaping or using nicotine containing products?

Financial questions:

1. How much do these products cost?
2. How do you think people who use these products, could spend their money, if they didn't vape or use nicotine containing products?
3. What do you think might be some long-term financial impacts for people who vape or use nicotine containing products?

Social questions:

1. Why do you think people start using any of these nicotine products?
2. What would you say to someone if they asked you to vape or try a nicotine pouch?
3. Have you ever felt pressurised to try vaping or to try a nicotine pouch? If so, how did you manage this?

All three topics, health, financial and social:

1. What are the benefits of not using these products? Think about the individual, wider society and the environment.
2. Why do you think people want to quit vaping or using nicotine containing products?

Additional information for facilitator:

Benefits of quitting vaping or quitting using a nicotine containing product:

- Nicotine will no longer have control of your life.
- You will no longer be dependent on a harmful and addictive substance.
- You will have improved self-esteem.
- You can eliminate the cycle of nicotine cravings and withdrawal symptoms.
- While withdrawal can cause short-term difficulties, in the long-term, quitting can lead to better mood, concentration, and sleep quality.
- Avoiding nicotine supports healthier brain development, which continues until around age 25.
- You will have a positive influence on younger brothers, sisters and friends.
- Nicotine use can cause gastrointestinal issues (nausea, upset stomach) and disrupt sleep patterns. Quitting or never starting can lead to better digestion and improved sleep quality.
- Nicotine is a stimulant that increases heart rate and blood pressure. By avoiding it, you reduce the strain on your cardiovascular system, which lowers your long-term risk of developing hypertension, heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.
- Avoiding nicotine means no impact on lung capacity and better blood circulation to muscles, which makes physical activity easier.
- You can avoid potential issues like gum irritation, sores, dry mouth, increased risk of cavities, and gum recession associated with nicotine pouch use.
- You are less likely to start/return to smoking tobacco.
- Using nicotine in adolescence may also increase risk for future addiction to other drugs so quitting will help prevent your risk of other addictions.
- You will save money.

ACTIVITY 6: Questionnaire for nicotine dependence

Delivery method:

Questionnaire.

Aim:

To examine a person's nicotine dependence, for those who currently vape or use other nicotine products.

Instructions:

This activity can be used with young people who currently use any nicotine containing product.

The questionnaire overleaf is a simple tool that can be used to determine nicotine dependence – i.e. addiction to nicotine.

This activity is most useful to demonstrate that e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches and other nicotine containing products are addictive, allowing the young person to reflect on their own use and dependence.

The questionnaire could be used alongside a couple of other activities in this book, in particular, the walking debate, to challenge the belief that a young person cannot get addicted to nicotine.

Give each person one copy of the Nicotine Dependence Questionnaire. Then explain how to complete the questionnaire:

- Simply answer each question and circle the score next to the response
- Add up all the scores from the six questions
- Use the score table at the bottom to determine whether the person has a low, medium or high dependence.



Nicotine dependence questionnaire

Choose the answers that best describe your use of a nicotine product, e.g. a vape or nicotine pouch.

| QUESTIONS | RESPONSES | SCORE |
|---|----------------------|-------|
| How many times per day do you usually use your nicotine product/s? (assume one time consists of around 15 puffs or lasts around 10 minutes) | 30 or more a day | 3 |
| | 21-30 | 2 |
| | 11-20 | 1 |
| | Up to 10 | 0 |
| How soon after waking do you first use your nicotine containing product/s? | Within 5 minutes | 3 |
| | 6-30 minutes | 2 |
| | 31-60 minutes | 1 |
| | Over 60 minutes | 0 |
| Do you find it difficult to not use this/these product/s in places where they are forbidden? | Yes | 1 |
| | No | 0 |
| Which time of day would you find most difficult to not use the product/s? | First in the morning | 1 |
| | Any other | 0 |
| Do you use the product/s more frequently in the first 2 hours of waking than during the rest of the day? | Yes | 1 |
| | No | 0 |
| Do you use this/these product/s when you are so ill that you are in bed most of the day? | Yes | 1 |
| | No | 0 |
| | TOTAL | |

SCORE TABLE

0-2 Low dependence

3-4 Moderate dependence

5-7 Hazardous use. You are likely to be having nicotine related problems

8+ High level of use. You are likely dependent on nicotine

Your result: _____

Whatever the results, if you feel uncomfortable about some of your answers, you may want to talk it over with someone, perhaps an adult you trust or a health care professional.

ACTIVITY 7: The role of the media

Delivery method:

Small group activity with discussion.

Aim:

To explore how the media and social media can influence our behaviour.

Instructions:

NOTE: You need to ask the group to prepare for this activity one week in advance.

Ask the group to observe over the next week, influencers and characters on social media, TV, in music videos, in films and adverts. Observe what products they are using, whether, it's cigarettes, vapes, nicotine pouches or any other nicotine containing product.

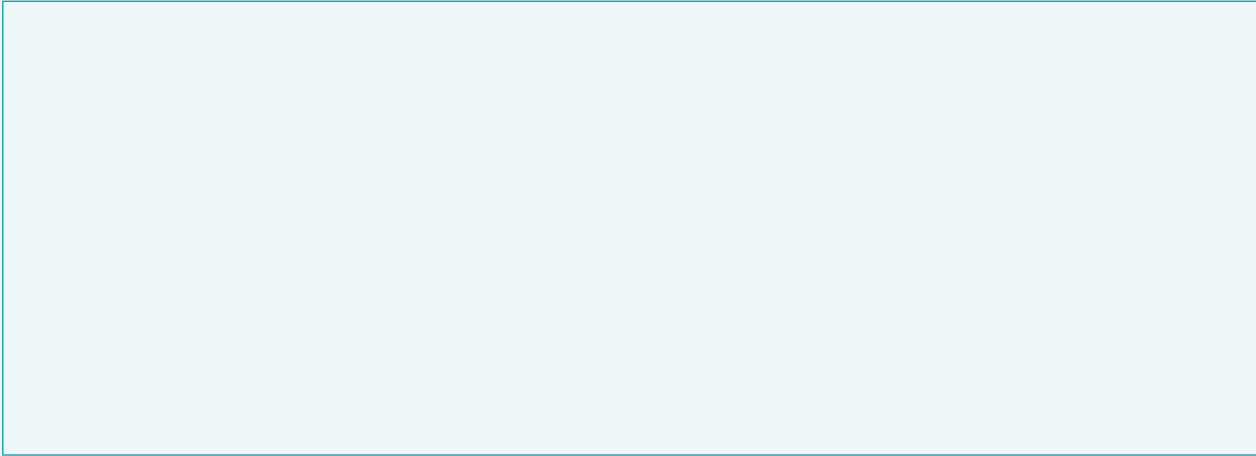
- The following week, divide into either pairs or small groups
- Give each pair or group a copy of the discussion points on the next two pages
- Tell them to discuss each of the points and write some responses in the boxes provided
- Give them 10 minutes to complete this activity
- Bring the group back and share responses with the wider group.



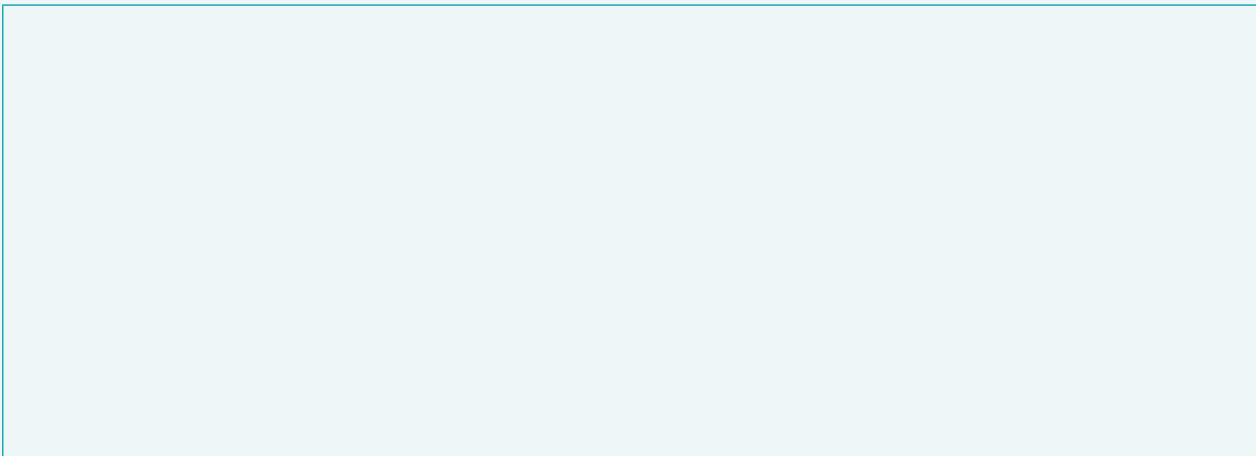
Handout: The role of the media

Page 1 of 2

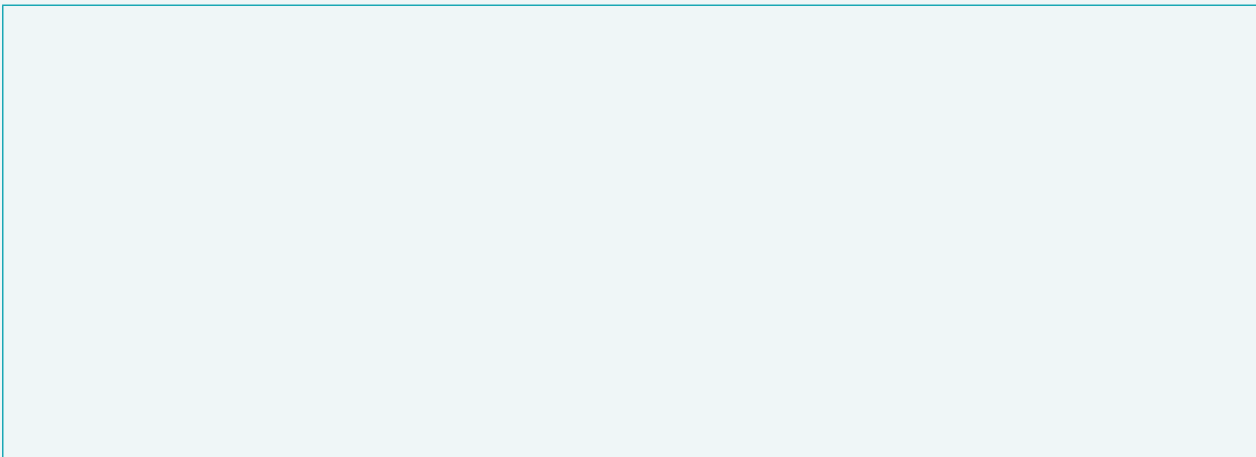
What types of characters on TV, in music videos and in films vape, smoke or use nicotine pouches?



How are these behaviours represented on TV, in music videos and in films?



If someone is trying to quit one of these products, for example, someone is trying to quit vaping, how do you think seeing someone vaping on TV or online affects them?



Handout: The role of the media

Page 2 of 2

Have you seen any influencers or celebrities using vapes or nicotine pouches on social media or online (e.g. Instagram, TikTok)? If so, what have you seen?

If you have seen someone vaping or using a nicotine pouch on social media, how is it being portrayed?

If you were with other people and saw someone using these products on a TV programme, in a film or on social media, what could you say to challenge it?

ACTIVITY 8: Vaping, the media and the tobacco industry

Delivery method:

Exploration and discussion.

Aim:

To explore media influences on young people in relation to smoking and the normalisation of vaping.

Instructions:



Play the video “Straight to vape: While you were streaming 2020”.

Use the QR code or you can use this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfGqQ_B-688.

You can also find this link on YouTube by typing in “Straight to vape: While you were streaming 2020”.



For more information on this article and the truth initiative click [THIS LINK](#) or scan the QR code.

When you have watched the video start a conversation about how the movie and TV industry has been used to promote vaping, in particular among young people.

Use the questions below to stimulate this conversation.

Start by asking this question:

- Do you think that movies, video games, music videos and/or TV have an influence on the lives of young people? If so, how?

Then ask this question:

- How do you think exposure to vaping in movies, video games, music videos or on TV gives young people a positive perception of vaping? What about other nicotine products?

Then finish with these questions:

- Are you surprised that even though most tobacco companies are barred from paid brand placement that a significant number of top grossing films continue to feature smoking and now vaping in movies targeted at teens?
- Do you think that exposure to vaping on TV increases young people’s intentions to try vaping?

Section 2

Read the following information:

The figures I am about to read are taken from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD)⁷ 2024. Young people aged between 15 and 16 years of age in 2024, were asked about their use of cigarettes, e-cigarettes and other nicotine containing products.

- Almost 1 in 4 reported that they have ever smoked
- More than 1 in 10 reported that they are current smokers
- Almost 1 in 3 reported that they have ever vaped
- More than 1 in 6 reported that they currently vape
- Roughly 1 in 33 reported that they currently use nicotine pouches

Now ask the group:

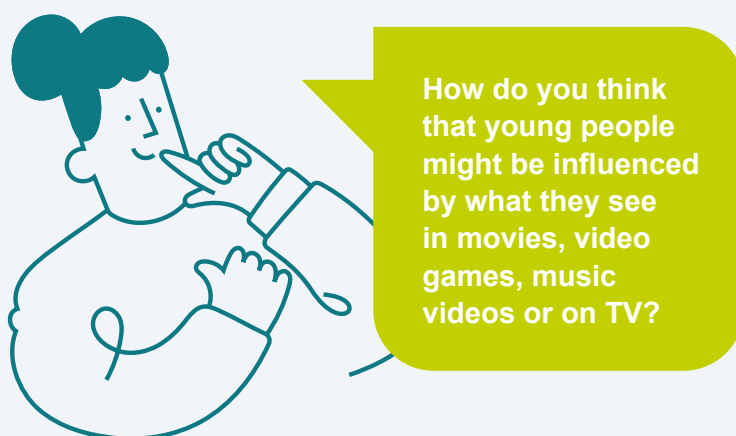
- What do you think about these figures? Are you surprised? Do you think they are accurate? What about other nicotine containing products, do you think they are used widely among people of your age?
- Why do you think that some young people decide to engage in these behaviours?

Finally finish off this session with the following question:

- If there were one key message to give to your peers, about nicotine containing products, what would it be?

Optional activity:

Watch this video which highlights how the industry is targeting young people through gaming. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boYxgQr1HRk>



⁷ <https://www.tri.ie/uploads/5/2/7/3/52736649/tfri-espadir-report2025-main.pdf> The data reported comprises responses from 5,587 students, including 2,002 students born in 2008, who were aged 15–16 at the time of the survey. The fieldwork was conducted in a representative sample of Irish post-primary schools between March and May 2024.

ACTIVITY 9: The truth about the tobacco and nicotine industry

Delivery method:

Walking debate.

Aim:

To explore the marketing tactics used by the tobacco and nicotine industry to influence young people to use their products.

Instructions:

Place three flip chart pages in a different corner of the room.

Write “Agree” on the first, “Disagree” on the second and “Not sure” on the third.

Explain that you are going to call out a statement (see statements below) about the tobacco and nicotine industry. Once the statement has been read, each participant should go to the relevant corner of the room according to what they think about that statement, i.e. do they agree, disagree or are they not sure.

Following each statement and when participants have selected their responses, facilitate a discussion about the participants’ thoughts on each statement.

Give participants an opportunity to voice their opinion and to challenge one another on their attitudes and opinions.

Always back up the discussion with the correct facts in response to the statement provided.

You can use the information on the next page to provide more detail. Statement 4 will allow you to delve into a deeper conversation about the marketing of nicotine products to young people.

Statements

Statement 1

The tobacco industry is concerned about the increase in e-cigarette and nicotine pouch use, as it is taking away from their customer base.

Response: The tobacco industry has invested heavily in the e-cigarette market, and more recently in other nicotine containing products, such as nicotine pouches.

Major tobacco companies, such as Altria, British American Tobacco, and Japan Tobacco International, own or have acquired popular e-cigarette and vaping brands, and are heavily invested in the market as cigarette sales decline. Philip Morris International, Reynolds American Inc., and Altria have all invested in popular nicotine pouch brands.

The tobacco industry has invested in these products as a way to expand its portfolio of nicotine products. Many brands have been noted for using flavours and marketing tactics that may appeal to young people. This is a strategic move by the tobacco industry to adapt to falling sales in cigarettes and to protect their profits.

Section 2

Statement 2:

Young people are less likely to become addicted to nicotine than adults or older people.

Response: This is false. E-cigarettes and nicotine pouches are designed to deliver nicotine quickly. Nicotine is highly addictive and children and young people are especially vulnerable as they become addicted very quickly. Nicotine can harm adolescent brain development. Getting addicted to nicotine at a young age makes it more difficult to quit at a later stage.

Extra note: Young people could complete the nicotine dependence questionnaire (Activity 6) to establish their own nicotine dependence if they are already vaping or using nicotine pouches.

Statement 3:

The tobacco industry deliberately markets its tobacco products to young people.

Response: The tobacco industry denies marketing their products to young people. The industry needs to recruit 50 new smokers in Ireland every day to maintain smoking rates. Since 80% of smokers start when they are children/young people, most of these new smokers are children or young people.

Below are some statements taken from the tobacco industry over the years:



Younger adults are the only sources of replacement smokers.

RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company, 1984

Today's teenager is tomorrow's potential regular customer and the overwhelming majority of smokers first begin to smoke while still in their teens... The smoking patterns of teenagers are particularly important to Philip Morris.

Philip Morris Tobacco Company, 1981





The ability to attract new smokers and develop them into a young adult franchise is key to brand development.

Phil Morris Report 1999

They got lips, we want them.

Reply of an RJ Reynolds representative when asked the age of the kids they were targeting



In the 1980s, R.J. Reynolds launched a controversial advertising campaign featuring a cartoon character called Joe Camel.

One of the more sinister elements of this campaign was the placing of the cartoon camel logo on products other than tobacco. The logo was placed on the soles of children's flip flops so it would leave a logo impression in the sand.

This use of tobacco logos on other products is called 'brand stretching'. Health experts at the time, flagged that this campaign was targeted at children in particular.

In 2011, Philip Morris International, launched an extensive mass media campaign under the slogan 'Don't be a Maybe. Be Marlboro', which was directly targeted at young people aged 18 – 24. The campaign originated in Germany but expanded quickly across 50 countries. It focused on characteristics likely to appeal to youth such as romance, creativity and decisiveness.

With 95% of teenagers using some form of social media, the industry also uses platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, to promote its products.

Statement 4:

The tobacco and nicotine industry markets e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches to young people.

Response: The tobacco industry owns many of the e-cigarette and nicotine pouch brands on the market. It is using the same tactics they used to sell cigarettes for decades. There are concerns that these products are being marketed to young people and non-smokers to be used as a recreational product.

Companies also employ tactics to promote newer nicotine products which are no longer permitted for marketing of cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and waterpipe tobacco. These include media spots, point-of-sale displays, and sponsorship.⁸ The Association for Young People's Health, an NGO working on youth health improvement, has raised concerns, pointing out that 'young people, who are early adopters of all new technologies, may be attracted to use e-cigarettes whether or not they already smoke'.⁹ There have also been increasing concerns about growing youth use of single-use (disposable) e-cigarettes and associated environmental harms in multiple countries.

Lawsuits have been taken against e-cigarette companies for promoting their products to young people, putting these addictive products into their hands and convincing them that they are harmless. For example, in the US, the New York Attorney General litigated and secured a multi-state half billion-dollar settlement from JUUL e-cigarette company for the role its marketing played in the vaping epidemic among young people. This is a very major development in the area – something which some young people may be aware of – and shifts the narrative here from 'concern' and 'criticism' to one of causation of harm and liability.¹⁰

Use the following questions to explore this topic in more detail:

- **What do you think about the flavours or the packaging of e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches?**

Response: These companies have been accused of designing flavours and packaging that appeal to young people. The flavours are often associated with treats, snacks and sweets and the packaging is colourful and often resemble sweets

- **What about disposable vapes? Do these make vaping more appealing to young people?**

Response: Disposable vapes in particular are cheap, which can make it easier for younger people to start using them. Up until the 1980s you could purchase single cigarettes. This was an easy way for children to access cigarettes. Single use vapes make access to vaping much easier and cheaper for young people to access.

See Section 1 for more information on how the Irish Government is planning to tackle some of the issues outlined above through legislation.

⁸ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7456773/>

⁹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmsctech/505/505.pdf>

¹⁰ For more information on this lawsuit read:

<https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2023/attorney-general-james-secures-462-million-juul-its-role-youth-vaping-epidemic>

- **Have you ever seen someone on social media promoting these products (remember promotion can be done discreetly just through use of a product or showing a product in video content)? If so, did this make them appealing to you or make you want to try them?**

Response: In the past, vaping companies have tried to advertise their products on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. Advertising standards organisations around the world, have found this to be in breach of advertising standards due to rules against the promotion of nicotine or nicotine-containing products that are not licensed medicines. However, despite this, some influencers still promote vaping on their social media platforms.

Another way that the industry normalises behaviour is by funding producers/writers of TV series and films to write vaping and smoking into their shows. This helps normalise and glamorize smoking and vaping. High exposure to on-screen smoking increases teen smoking initiation by roughly 40%, while vaping imagery increases likelihood of vaping by about 30%.¹¹

Research conducted by the Irish Heart Foundation and the Irish Cancer Society in 2019, also found that young people in Ireland have rejected the idea that the e-cigarette manufacturers do not design their advertising and packaging to attract children.

Finish this discussion by presenting the image overleaf and having a discussion about the image. Use the questions below to start this conversation:

Suggested questions:

- Does this display remind you of anything?
Note for facilitator: This looks like a sweet display
- Do you think this is set up to be attractive to children and young people or to adults?

¹¹ <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2022/05/exposure-to-smoking-and-vaping-in-films-increases-uptake-in-young-people-new-study>

Section 2



Additional information for the facilitator:

Who is the tobacco industry?

The tobacco industry is a very powerful and manipulative industry, which has one goal, to make money. This means that they need people to buy their products regardless of the health impact that their products can have on their customers.

The four largest companies are:

- Philip Morris – worth \$13.5 billion
- British American Tobacco – worth \$5.2 billion
- Imperial Tobacco – worth \$2.6 billion
- Japan Tobacco International – worth \$7.7 billion

The tobacco industry has a problem in that 1-in-2 smokers will die from a smoking related illness. The industry tries to recruit children and young people, as it needs to find replacement consumers to buy and consume their products. Who are the most likely to take the risk of starting to smoke or vape and ignore the consequences? The answer is young people.

Publicly the tobacco industry has always claimed that it does not use advertising to attract young people into smoking. However, documents from the tobacco industry, once confidential but now in the public domain reveal that they see the recruitment of under 18s to smoking as essential. The same playbook is being played out in relation to vaping, nicotine pouches and some other nicotine containing products.

The tobacco industry is a very powerful and manipulative industry, which has one goal, to make money.



ACTIVITY 10: What do we really know about nicotine containing products?

Delivery method:

Creative drawing/performance and provision of information.

Aim:

To raise awareness about the harms of nicotine addiction and using these products.

Instructions:

Divide the group into smaller groups of three or four, or as you see appropriate. Using the statements/questions below, ask the groups to design a poster highlighting the statements outlined.

Alternatively, the groups could create a performance highlighting the facts about using these products based on the statements/questions and the supporting information.

You can choose some or all of the statements/questions, depending on time, age of the group and topics that arise in your everyday conversations with young people. You can also choose to give each group a different statement/question.

Statements/Questions

1. **What are the long-term health effects of using products that contain nicotine, for example, a vape or using nicotine pouches?**

Supporting information: The truth is that we do not know what the long-term health effects of these products are. However, we do know that they contain nicotine. Nicotine is extremely addictive and can damage a young person's brain.

Nicotine can cause anxiety and depression or make these worse for people already suffering from anxiety and depression. It also affects memory, concentration, self-control and attention, especially in the developing brains of young people.

Adolescents who use nicotine may be at increased risk for future addiction to other drugs and they are more likely to smoke cigarettes in the future. The Health Research Board reported that young people who do not smoke but who start vaping are three to five times more likely to start smoking than those who never vaped.¹² This is an extremely worrying finding. We have made huge inroads to protect children from the harms caused by smoking. Vaping, and potentially nicotine pouches, jeopardise these important public health gains.

Acute nicotine exposure can be toxic. Children and adults have been poisoned by swallowing, breathing, or absorbing vaping liquid through their skin or eyes.

Aerosol from e-cigarettes can also contain harmful substances. These include cancer-causing chemicals and tiny particles that can be inhaled deep into lungs.

¹² <https://www.hrb.ie/publication/electronic-cigarette-use-and-tobacco-cigarette-smoking-initiation-in-adolescents-an-evidence-review/>

E-cigarettes can be modified to deliver marijuana and other harmful substances that have been linked to lung disease.

Defective e-cigarette batteries have caused some fires and explosions, which exposes the user to the risk of serious injury and burns.

Nicotine pouches can cause oral damage. They contain harmful chemicals that can cause gum damage. The risk of oral cancer and gum disease may increase with every pouch. Further research into the effects of nicotine pouch use on oral health is required. Early studies have shown that they may cause lesions, dry mouth, soreness, blisters and a strange jaw sensation.¹³

2. Misconceptions about the harms of smoking verses the harms of vaping or using nicotine pouches

Supporting information: E-cigarettes, nicotine pouches and some of the other nicotine containing products are often promoted as being ‘safer’ than smoking cigarettes, but what does this mean and is this a good comparison?

Smoking tobacco cigarettes is incredibly dangerous. Cigarettes kill 1-in-2 people who smoke and on average lead to 10 years of life lost for people who smoke. Each week in Ireland, almost 100 people die and 1,000 people are hospitalised from preventable disease caused by smoking.

Vaping or using nicotine pouches do not involve burning tobacco, which releases tar and other chemicals known to be extremely harmful to human health, but to say a product is not as dangerous as combustible cigarettes does not mean that it is free from serious harms. (See Section 1 for more information on the harms of vaping and using other nicotine containing products).

A big issue when we talk about the known harms of e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches or other similar products is that it’s possible that there are serious harms that are currently unknown and will only emerge as we continue following people who use these products, through studies over the coming decades.

In summary, for young people, using any nicotine product offers no benefit. There is evidence already of serious harms from nicotine exposure and we can expect this list of harms to grow over time.

3. Is using these products a personal choice?

Supporting information: This is open to interpretation. Some people may believe that vaping or using nicotine pouches is a personal choice. Experimentation with new experiences is a common part of adolescence and growing up. Experimentation can also be influenced by peer groups and pressure from other young people to fit in. The first number of times a person tries a nicotine product may be considered a personal choice but addiction and therefore compulsive drives to continue this behaviour can set in quite quickly. We know that nicotine is a powerful addictive drug. We know that younger people are more susceptible to nicotine use due to their tendency to be compulsive, and to subsequent addiction because their brain is still developing.

¹³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11297755/>

Completing the questionnaire for nicotine dependence will help determine a person's physical addiction to nicotine. Once you are addicted to nicotine, it is not a personal choice and that's why we need to regulate things like marketing, displays and using nicotine products indoors so young people don't start in the first instance and don't see it as the normal thing to do.

Young people are being exposed to advertisements for nicotine products, which are sometimes promoted as safe and fun products, on social media platforms such as TikTok. Some young people may believe that they are taking part in something that is safe. They may also feel pressurised to experiment with these products by the marketing tactics of the industry and those promoting them or by their peers.

Consider people who do not vape but who are exposed to second hand vapour – do they have a choice?

4. How difficult is it to give up using these products?

Supporting information: E-cigarettes and nicotine pouches contain nicotine, a drug that is highly addictive. You don't have to use them every day to get addicted. Nicotine addiction can occur after only two or three e-cigarettes or use of nicotine products. When a person consumes or inhales nicotine, nicotine receptors are formed in the brain which then crave ongoing exposure to nicotine. The more often a person is exposed to nicotine and the higher the dose of nicotine the more nicotine receptors are formed in the brain. This results in higher levels of addiction. Within a few seconds of entering the body, nicotine reaches the brain, where it causes a release of adrenaline. Most people feel immediate pleasure and a slight burst of energy. When a person quits vaping, smoking or using a nicotine pouch, they experience withdrawal symptoms because their body is craving another hit.

Defective e-cigarette batteries have caused some fires and explosions, which exposes the user to the risk of serious injury and burns.



ACTIVITY 11: Vaping, nicotine pouches and the environment

Delivery method:

Discussion, observation and feedback.

Aim:

To explore the impact that vaping and using other nicotine products has on the environment.

Instructions:

Start by asking the following questions:

- What are the environmental risks of vaping to local communities?
- What are the environmental risks of using nicotine pouches to local communities?

If they are struggling to come up with any answers, you can use these additional questions to prompt responses:

- What do you think about litter when you see it in your community, playgrounds, school, etc.?
- How does this affect you and your health?
- How can animals and other wildlife be harmed by litter?
- How might vaping affect habitats and biodiversity?
- How might nicotine pouches affect habitats and biodiversity?
- Where does litter go when it is washed away in drains and rivers?
- What is the impact on animals and other wildlife then?
- How does e-cigarette/nicotine pouch litter add to climate change?

Follow this discussion with this question:

- What do you think are some of the global impacts of vaping or using nicotine pouches on the environment?

To support this conversation, see information in Section 1 on page 14.

Follow up activity

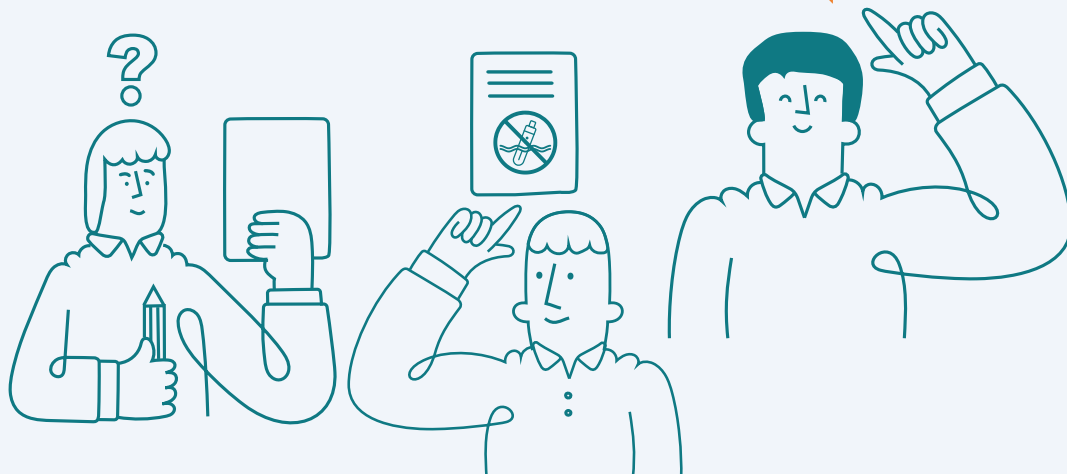
- Over the following week, ask the young people to observe the rubbish that they see in either school, playgrounds or in their community. In particular ask them to observe litter caused by either e-cigarettes or nicotine pouches.
- During the next session, ask them to report back their observations and their thoughts about this and have a discussion. Alternatively, they can draw their findings. Use the following questions to prompt the conversation:
 - Were you surprised/shocked?
 - Where did you observe the most litter?
 - Describe the actual litter related to these products that you found.
 - How did seeing this litter make you feel?

Design a poster

Finish this lesson by asking the young people to design a poster promoting the safe disposal of litter associated with any nicotine product.

You could suggest that they consider doing a community clean up, litter picking day or contacting their local authority or local tidy towns committee to see if there is some way they could work together on an environmental clean up project.

Design a poster



ACTIVITY 12: Saying 'no'/refusal skills

Delivery method:

Discussion and role play.

Aim:

To develop refusal skills and learn how to say 'no'.

Instructions:

Start by asking the group if they understand what assertiveness is.

Then present the following sentences and ask them if they know which one is assertive, which one is passive and which one is aggressive.

1. I am not really sure if I want to try that (passive)
2. Stop annoying me and buzz off (aggressive)
3. Thank you for the offer, but I do not want to try vaping. It is bad for my health (assertive)

Now introduce the topic of peer pressure by asking:

- Why do some young people vape or use nicotine pouches?
- Is this something that you have been asked to try?
- How difficult is it to say 'no' in these situations?

Then introduce the topic of 'saying no'.

- If you don't want to try something, how can you say 'no'?

Remind them that you can say 'no' in an assertive manner that is clear without being rude or aggressive.

Ask them to come up with some suggestions for saying 'no' to being offered to try a vape, a nicotine pouch or even a cigarette. Here are some examples to get you started:

- Saying, 'No thanks' or 'I'm good' and walking away.
- Telling your friend that vaping isn't healthy, so it's not for you.
- Telling your friend that vaping/using nicotine pouches is against the group rules and you are not going to break these rules.
- Telling your friend that you want to play sport, and vaping would make that harder to do.
- Telling your friend that you are studying for exams, and using nicotine pouches could make it harder to concentrate.

You can also use the 'Handout – Refusal skills' which gives more examples of some of these skills.

Complete this session with a role play where the young people get to practice these skills.

Handout – Refusal skills

Remember that we are all different and that what works for one person may not work for others. Review this list and choose a few options that you would feel comfortable using.

| What to do | How to do it | Examples |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Say 'no thanks!' | Speak calmly and with confidence. Do not hesitate but speak clearly and firmly. | 'No thanks, that's not for me.' 'I'm not into it.' |
| Explain why you don't want to try it | Explain that it isn't healthy, so it's not for you. Explain that you have read about how using nicotine products can affect your mental and physical health. | 'I have read about nicotine and what it does to your health, so I don't want to try it.' 'I want to play sport and vaping would make that harder to do.' |
| Body language | Be mindful of your posture and position. Stand tall and confident. Make eye contact. | Stand up straight and try to look relaxed and friendly. Make eye contact. Keep your arms relaxed by your sides. |
| Change the subject | Suggest doing something else or try to distract those involved. | 'No, but I'd love something to eat.' 'Let's see if the others are here.' 'Will we go in and see if the music has started?' |
| Use humour | Make light of the situation. Humour can help. | 'No thanks, that stuff stunts your growth.' |
| Broken record | Repeat yourself, remembering to speak calmly and with confidence. | 'No thanks, I really don't want it, no.' 'Maybe you didn't hear me: I said no thanks!' |
| Walk away | If you have tried everything, sometimes the best option is just to walk away. | Move towards people you are more comfortable with. |

Role play – Saying ‘No’

Divide into small groups of 2 or 3 people.

Give each group a copy of Roles A and B (see below).

- Role A: the role of someone who has either recently quit vaping or has never vaped
- Role B: the person who is offering a vape

Ensure that everyone reverses roles so that everyone gets a chance to say ‘no’.

Once role plays are complete, use the following questions to reflect on what they have learned:

- Who managed not to vape?
- How did you feel dealing with the persistent offer of a vape?
- Was it easy/difficult to say ‘no’?
- What made it easy/difficult?
- How did you feel pressuring someone to vape who had just quit or didn’t want to vape?
- What do you feel about the statement ‘you are refusing a request not rejecting the person’?

Note: You can substitute a vape with nicotine pouch or cigarettes if that is more relevant to your group.

Role A

You have recently quit vaping/have never vaped

- A friend you have not seen for a while meets you and offers you a vape.
- They insist on you taking one.
- You have to say ‘no’.
- This may include being pleasant and polite, giving reasons for saying ‘no’, perhaps getting firmer with your friend, stating your bottom line.

Remember you are refusing a request, not rejecting a person.

Role B

You are vaping

- You meet your friend that you haven’t seen for a while.
- You offer them a vape.
- They refuse. Be persistent!
- Try and convince them to take one.
- Use various reasons for taking one.

ACTIVITY 13: Trusted sources of information

Delivery method:

Discussion and research.

Aim:

To know where to find trusted sources of information about nicotine products.

Instructions:

Note: Internet access is required for this activity.

Start by asking the group:

- Where do you get your information from?
- How can you tell if the information on a website is true or not?

This will start a conversation about reliable sources of information.

Explain to the group that it is important to check the reliability of sources of information that they find. Not everything that they see online is true and some things they read might only be telling half of the story. It is important to be able to spot fake news or red flags:

- **Credentials of the person or organisation:** Check the source of the information, has it come from a person or organisation with expertise or is the source of the information unknown?
- **Up to date information:** Is the information up to date? When was the data or source last updated?
- **Relevance of the information:** Does the content of the information support their research. Does it address their needs or is it vague?
- **Objectivity and bias:** Where is the source of the information coming from? Could there be bias in the information being presented. Objective sources remain neutral while biased sources may present a one-sided perspective. Check what has influenced the point of view.

Spotting Fake News – red flags

- Divide the group into small groups of 2 or 3. Give each group a copy of the activity worksheet: 'Spotting fake news'.
- Each group has to choose a news story that they don't know much about, preferably one that is shared on one of their social media feeds. If they don't have a social media account, they can type 'trending topics' into the search engine and chose a story from the results.
- Explain that they while they are reading the story, they must apply the 'spotting fake news' questions to the story. If something doesn't seem right or where they may need to question the truth behind what they are reading, then this would be a 'red flag'.
- The aim is to identify stories that are trustworthy (green flag) or those that may be fake news (red flag).

When they have completed this task:

- Remind the young people that things they see on Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, read online, or even hear from their friends, aren't always valid or reliable sources of information.
- Next, give the young people a copy of the worksheet: Finding trusted sources of information about nicotine products.
- Explain that they are going to research a nicotine product, for example, vapes, nicotine pouches or snus. They have to find trusted and reliable sources of information about that product from the internet.
- When they have completed their research, invite the groups to report back to the wider group.

Remind the young people that things they see on Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, read online, or even hear from their friends, aren't always valid or reliable sources of information.



Activity Worksheet: Spotting Fake News – red flags¹⁴

Ask the following questions to check news stories for fake or misleading information.

The more red flags you find in a story, the less you should trust the information.

Heading/Photo Check

1. Does the headline include ALL CAPS, too much punctuation (!!), or dramatic language?
Yes | No
2. Does the lead image seem altered or out of place?
Yes | No

Content Check

3. Do the details in the story confirm the headline's claim?
Yes | No
4. Is anyone quoted in the story? Are the sources quoted qualified to speak on the topic?
Yes | No
5. Is the language in the story completely one-sided?
Yes | No
6. Do other news sources verify the information reported in the story?
Yes | No

Source Check

7. Is the source of the story well known?
Yes | No
8. Does the story include an author's name?
Yes | No
9. Does the source's website contain an 'About Us' page? Does the 'About Us' page share newsgathering credentials?
Yes | No
10. If you discovered the story on a social site, are people commenting and saying that it's false?
Yes | No

Gut Check

11. Does something about the site seem suspicious (clickbait headlines, poor design, multiple stories attacking one person, etc.)?
Yes | No
12. Does your gut say the story is false?
Yes | No

¹⁴ Adapted from: <https://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/>

Activity worksheet: Finding trusted sources of information about nicotine products

Instructions: Find five facts about a nicotine product from valid and reliable online sources. Choose one type of product, for example, vapes, nicotine pouches or snus. Try to find information about:

- how these products impact health,
- how old someone needs to be to buy these products in Ireland (remember this may be different for different types of nicotine products), and
- something new you learned about these products that surprised you.

Type of product: _____

1. Five facts about this product:

| |
|----|
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |
| 4. |
| 5. |

2. How do you know that this information is trustworthy?

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

3. Knowing what you know now, what would you say to someone who asked you to try this product?

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Or

If you have already tried this product, what you say to someone else who was thinking of trying this product for the first time?

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Useful webpages



[SPHE Healthy Choices Unit 2
– Nicotine Addiction YouTube video](#)



www.healthpromotion.ie



[HSE information on vaping](#)



[SPHE Making Healthy Choices](#)



[Straight to vape While you were streaming
2020 YouTube video](#)



[Smokeless nicotine and tobacco products](#)

Appendix

Commonly used phrases and words used to describe e-cigarettes and the act of vaping¹⁵

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Vapes | Vapes (e-cigarettes) are battery-powered devices. They heat nicotine mixed with flavourings and other chemicals to create an aerosol that the user inhales. |
| Vaping | Using an e-cigarette is known as vaping. |
| Disposable vapes | Devices that are not refillable and are intended for one-time use. |
| Refillable system, refillable devices | These systems require e-liquid and come in three varieties: box mods, pens and refillable pods. These devices have tanks or pods that are continuously refilled with e-liquid. These systems are used more by “hobbyist” vapers because they require more upkeep and are typically modified. |
| Closed pod system | A type of device that uses disposable pods containing e-liquid (typically 200 – 500 puffs). The body of these devices can be recharged, and the disposable pods can be replaced with new compatible pods. |
| Clouds | The vape mist that is produced during vaping. |
| E-liquid, vape juice or e-juice | <p>E-liquid is sometimes referred to as vape juice or e-juice. E-liquid is used in open/refillable systems and comes in a variety of flavours.</p> <p>E-liquid typically contains nicotine and is made of vegetable glycerine or propylene glycol, water and flavourings. There are more than 7,000 e-liquid flavours on the market including menthol, fruit, dessert, coffee, alcoholic beverage and cigar flavours.</p> |
| Ghost | A vape trick where a user will inhale as much as they can and not exhale. |
| Starter kit | A kit that includes basic e-cigarette equipment designed for newcomers to vaping. Most starter kits come with one or more atomizers, one or more batteries, a charger and a number of cartridges sometimes pre-filled with juice. |
| Hit, drag or rip | Refers to a single “puff” from an e-cigarette or tobacco cigarette. |
| Throat hit or kick | The tingling feeling in the back of the throat when vaporizing e-liquid that contains nicotine. |

¹⁵ Adapted with permission from Foróige, Northwest Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force (NWRDATF) and Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB (MSLETB); “What’s the panic about vaping?” A report on the use of vaping products among children and young people in Sligo and Leitrim. <https://www.foroige.ie/blog/foroige-sligo-release-vaping-research-report>

