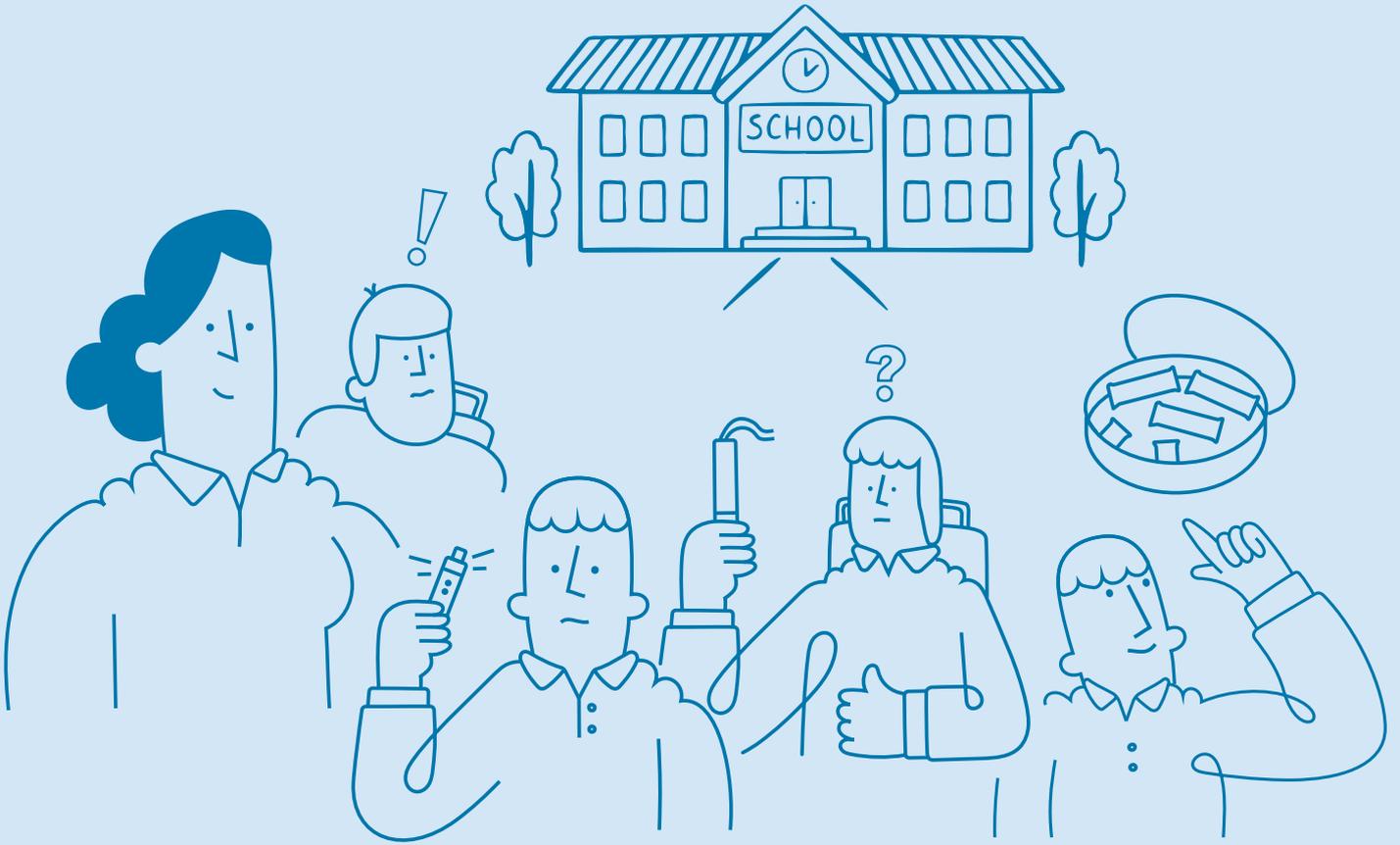




Health and Wellbeing

Information and guidance on e-cigarettes and other nicotine containing products for schools





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Background information

What are e-cigarettes and other nicotine containing products?

The class of products that this resource describes are collectively referred to as nicotine delivery systems. These systems include any device or item that delivers nicotine to the body. There are a variety of these products available on the market, including tobacco cigarettes, e-cigarettes, roll your own tobacco, synthetic oral nicotine pouches (sometimes referred to as snus) and hookah. There are new products and delivery systems being developed all the time.

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

E-cigarettes (often referred to as vapes) use an 'e-liquid' that usually contains nicotine, as well as varying compositions of flavourings, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerine, and other ingredients. The e-liquid is heated to create an aerosol that the user inhales or 'vapes'. 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. Some e-cigarette product labels do not show that they contain nicotine. Some e-liquids sold as 0% nicotine have been tested and found to contain nicotine.

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.

Nicotine pouches are similar to snus pouches and 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. Because these products are not made from tobacco but are made using synthetic nicotine, they do not currently fall under traditional tobacco control legislation.

Loose tobacco for 'making roll your own' (RYO) is loose tobacco that allows a person to roll their own cigarettes. Contrary to what some people believe, loose tobacco is just as harmful as that found in regular cigarettes.

Heat-not-burn devices also known as 'heated tobacco' or 'smokeless tobacco' are electronic devices that heat a type of cigarette containing tobacco which is inserted into the device. The tobacco within the cigarette is heated to a high temperature, without setting the cigarette alight, creating smoke, which the user inhales. They contain tobacco, nicotine, additives and are often flavoured. These devices are illegal in Ireland.

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.

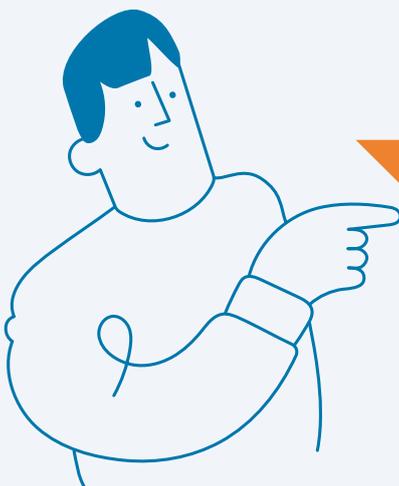
Snuff is a type of smokeless tobacco. It is finely cut or powdered, cured tobacco that is typically sold in tins. Snuff is typically sniffed through the nostrils.

New and emerging products

The industry is constantly introducing new products to the market, many of which are only emerging in Ireland or have not yet reached 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 is a type of nicotine product that is rubbed on the skin and then absorbed into the bloodstream. It contains several chemicals including nicotine, humectants such as propylene glycol and a variety of preservatives.

Dissolvable nicotine products include lozenges (not to be confused with the Nicotine Replacement Therapy lozenge which is regulated and does not contain tobacco), oral use strips or sticks, and nicotine sweets. Most of these dissolvable products dissolve in the mouth and do not require spitting or discarding of the product. They contain nicotine along with several other additives and chemicals.



The class of products that this resource describes are collectively referred to as nicotine delivery systems. These systems include any device or item that delivers nicotine to the body.

What are the risks for young people?

The brain of a young person is still developing up to the age of 25 and using nicotine can harm the parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood and impulse control. Using nicotine can change a young person's brain and create lifelong nicotine addiction.

E-cigarettes and nicotine containing products can contain harmful and potentially harmful ingredients, including:

- Nicotine, which is highly addictive
- 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 and cardiovascular disease

Nicotine also has physical effects on the body. People who smoke, vape or use nicotine pouches 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

Nicotine addiction develops rapidly (after just a few cigarettes, vaping sessions or pouch uses) and with more frequent use higher levels of brain chemistry changes and addiction occurs. People may also experience nicotine withdrawal when they are using these products or in situations or places where they are unable to consume nicotine. Common symptoms of nicotine withdrawal include:

- Anger, frustration, and irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, studying and retaining information
- Feeling tired or groggy
- Having trouble sleeping
- Anxiety and depression

Systematic reviews of e-cigarettes

A systematic review conducted by the Health Research Board (HRB) in 2020, found that young people who vape are 3 to 5 times more likely to start using conventional tobacco cigarettes.¹

In the same year, the HRB also conducted a review of the harms associated with e-cigarette use.² There was some early evidence of damage to cardiovascular and respiratory tissue, mainly due to metals and volatile organic compounds. Four cross-sectional surveys on cancers identified the presence of carcinogens for lung, oral, and oesophageal cancer, and one identified biomarker for bladder cancers. Other observed harms were due to acute events associated with the use of e-cigarettes. They included poisonings, burns, fractures, lung injury and exacerbations of asthma. There were fatalities among the poisonings and respiratory disease cases, and long-term disability among some burn cases.

A more recent review from the UK conducted in 2024 supports these findings. It found that in addition to an association between vaping and subsequent smoking, vaping was also linked to marijuana use, alcohol use, asthma, cough, injuries and mental health outcomes.³

Who is using these products?

There has been an increase in vaping among children and young people. In addition to this, we are also beginning to see an increasing number of young people use nicotine pouches. This is something, which has been seen in many other countries.

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.

- 1 O'Brien D, Long J, Lee C, Mc Carthy A & Kavanagh P (2020): Association between electronic cigarette use and tobacco cigarette smoking initiation in adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis <https://www.hrb.ie/publication/association-between-electronic-cigarette-use-and-tobacco-cigarette-smoking-initiation-in-adolescents-a-systematic-review-and-meta-analysis/>
- 2 McCarthy A, Lee C, O'Brien D, Long J (2020). Harms and benefits of e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn tobacco products: A literature map. https://www.hrb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Harms_and_benefits_of_e-cigarettes_and_heat-not-burn_tobacco_products_Literature_map.pdf
- 3 Golder S et al, 2024. Vaping and harm in young people: umbrella review: <https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2025/08/17/tc-2024-059219>

HSE Recommendations

The HSE recommends that every effort is made to discourage young people from vaping or using any nicotine containing products.

Key points for communicating with your whole school community:

- The use of these products is increasing among young people in particular (1 in 5).
- Parents should be encouraged to talk to their children about the risks of nicotine addiction, smoking, vaping and using other nicotine containing products. Further guidance for parents on how to talk to their child or adolescent about vaping and nicotine see: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/other-products/young-people/#talking-to-your-child-about-nicotine-and-vaping>
- Schools should consider reviewing their substance use policies and procedures and include e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches and other nicotine containing products as prohibited substances in their substance use policy.
- Schools can access SPHE lessons relevant to cigarettes, e-cigarettes and nicotine addiction in the Making Healthy Choices Units 1 and 2 of the HSE Junior Cycle SPHE resource.

Making Healthy Choices 1:

Activity 6 Talking about Healthy Choices

Activity 7 Second-hand Smoke

Activity 8 E-cigarettes and Vaping

Activity 12 Exploring Drugs

Activity 13 Pressure to Conform

Making Healthy Choices 2:

Activity 6 Tobacco and E-cigarettes/Vapes

Activity 7 Marketing of Tobacco and E-Cigarettes

Activity 13 Assertiveness and Refusal Skills

These and other resources can be accessed at this link: <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/junior-cycle/short-courses/sphe/sphe-2023/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-teaching-and-learning-in-sphe/>

What can schools do?

As reflected in the Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice, schools have an important role to play in supporting students to make conscious and informed decisions about the risks associated with substance use, including creating a culture and environment that supports them to make healthy choices.

The central objective of a school's substance use policy is the welfare, care and protection of every young person, and sets out in writing, the framework within which the whole school community manages issues relating to substance use.

Taking a whole school approach is the most effective way to protect students from the risks associated with vaping and nicotine use. The school's substance use policy provides a framework for actions related to e-cigarette and nicotine use.

When reviewing your policy consider:

Curriculum

- How do we achieve the learning outcomes for substance use outlined in the [Junior Cycle](#) and [Senior Cycle](#) SPHE Curriculum Specifications?
- In what other curriculum areas could teaching and learning around substance use take place?
- How can we support school staff with teaching and learning related to substance use through access to information and continuous professional development?

Culture and Environment

How do we currently manage incidents relating to substance use, and how will this apply to e-cigarettes and other nicotine containing products?

Consider:

- Where are young people most at risk of using these products? Does our school have a shared understanding of what constitutes an incident?
 - Remember the use of nicotine pouches (commonly called snus) can be very discreet and young people may be using these in the classroom.
 - Indications of nicotine pouch/snus use may present in more discreet ways such as irritability or anxiety, or with students displaying possible physical symptoms like dizziness or nausea. The best way to know for sure is to have a direct conversation with the student. The only smell may be a lingering fruity or candy-like aroma from the flavouring.
- How do we achieve a balance between a pastoral approach and disciplinary approach to incidents?

Policy and Planning

- How does this policy link to other school policies e.g. Code of Behaviour, Health and Safety, SPHE Plan?
- Do we need to update policies to reflect changes in our substance use policy?

Relationships

- How do we involve our whole school community in the process of updating our policy?
- How do we communicate changes in our policy to students, parents and staff?

How to talk to a young person about using these products?

Here are some suggestions when talking to children and young people about using these products:

- Ask questions like: what do they think about vaping or nicotine pouches/snus? Do they know people who vape or use nicotine pouches? Why do they think people use these products?
- Listen to them, learn from them, but also use what you know to help them understand the facts about nicotine addiction, smoking, vaping, nicotine pouches and other nicotine containing products.
- Talk about the different reasons why young people may vape or use other nicotine containing products and give examples such as wanting to fit in, curiosity, stress, etc.
- Help them prepare how to respond if they feel pressured to try vaping or any other nicotine containing products.

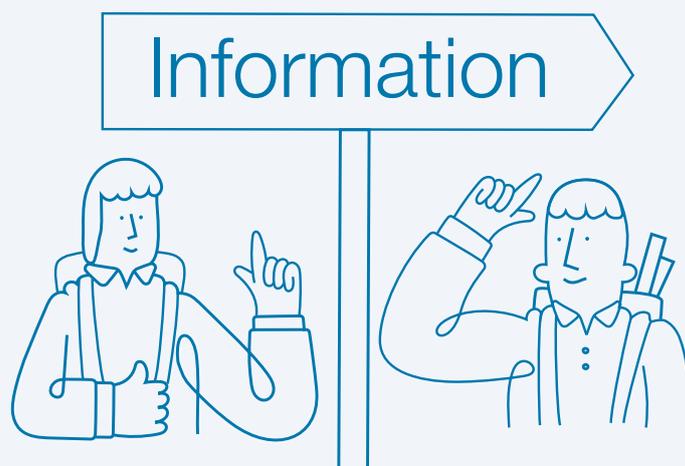
Where can children and young people get information if they are concerned about using these products?

The HSE has developed content for anyone who wants more information on these products, see the link below:

<https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/other-products/>

There is also a page with information on how to quit vaping:

<https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/other-products/quit-vaping/>



E-cigarettes and nicotine containing products and legislation

In 2024, an amendment to the Public Health (Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act was introduced by government. The Act bans the sale of nicotine inhaling products to those under the age of 18.

In 2025, the government announced plans to introduce new laws that will ban disposable e-cigarettes, restrict flavours and packaging, and introduce shop display bans to curb youth appeal.

A new tax on e-liquid was applied in Budget 2025, where 50c per millilitre of nicotine was applied.

The above legislation does not apply to nicotine pouches. 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.

In 2025, the government announced plans to introduce new laws that will ban disposable e-cigarettes, restrict flavours and packaging, and introduce shop display bans to curb youth appeal.



Marketing of these products to young people

Although the industry claims that it does not target young people, the flavours of e-cigarettes, nicotine pouches and some of the other nicotine containing products make them more attractive to this age cohort. The appearance of e-cigarettes and other nicotine containing products is constantly changing. Some e-cigarettes for example, are designed to look like everyday items such as USB sticks, highlighters, credit cards, remote controls and pens.

Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine. Some e-liquids marketed as containing 0% nicotine have been found to contain nicotine. Some e-cigarette products can also contain THC (the main psychoactive compound found in cannabis) or CBD (also found in cannabis, but not psychoactive), with or without flavouring. Products containing THC and HHC are now illegal in Ireland.

Where are young people accessing e-cigarettes and nicotine containing products?

A study conducted by the HSE Environmental Health Service found that adolescents can access e-cigarettes easily.⁴ Social media was the most popular way to obtain them with children using Snapchat and Instagram to buy and sell products between themselves.

Products were also purchased in shops such as discount stores and vape shops, where any age restrictions were not difficult to overcome. Most participants had not discussed e-cigarettes with their parents. By contrast, most had discussed smoking with their parents.

Similarly, their findings suggest that smoking, alcohol consumption and use of e-cigarettes are interlinked.

If you are aware of a retailer who is selling vapes to anyone under 18 in your community you can report this to the Environmental Health Service by emailing tobacconehs@hse.ie or calling the compliance Line, on Lo-Call 1800 333 100.

Resources for teaching and learning related to substance use

HSE Junior and Senior Cycle SPHE Resources

- <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/junior-cycle/short-courses/sphe/sphe-2023/sphe-toolkit/resources-for-teaching-and-learning-in-sphe/>

Resources suitable for Transition Year SPHE

- <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/senior-cycle/sphe/transition-year-sphe-toolkit/resources-for-learning-and-teaching-sphe-2024/>

⁴ Evans, DS, Hickey P (2020). E-cigarette & Smoking Use among Adolescents in Ireland: A Focus Group Study. Report prepared on behalf of the Tobacco Control Operational Unit, HSE.

