



Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping: Factsheet



Evidence ratings:



This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year: Year 7–8, Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Drugs (General), Electronic Cigarettes/Vaping, Tobacco

Tags: Vaping, E-cigarette, Smoking

Origin: Australian

Cost:

Free

Other names

E-cigarette, e-cigs, vaping, vape, vape pens, pods, Juul, electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), puff bars, and e-hookah.

What are e-cigarettes?

E-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that hold and heat e-liquids that emit vapours that users inhale. Using an e-cigarette is called vaping. E-cigarettes can look like traditional cigarettes, cigars or everyday items such as USBs or pens.

E-liquid can contain nicotine which is the same drug present in regular cigarettes and other tobacco products. This means that vaping can also become addictive. E-cigarette products bought in Australia are not legally allowed to contain nicotine. But if purchased somewhere else (e.g. online or overseas) they may contain nicotine because labelling may not be regulated like in Australia. Additionally, even when labelled as 'flavoured', e-liquids can still contain nicotine because labelling is not always correct on e-cigarette products. E-liquids often contain chemicals like propylene glycol, glycerol, and ethylene glycol, some of which are known to cause cancer.

Although it is illegal in Australia, e-cigarettes are sometimes used to vape/inhale cannabis and other illicit drugs. Cannabis e-liquids can contain ingredients which are not listed on the labels, including nicotine and/or other drugs. This can increase the risk of addiction to vaping.

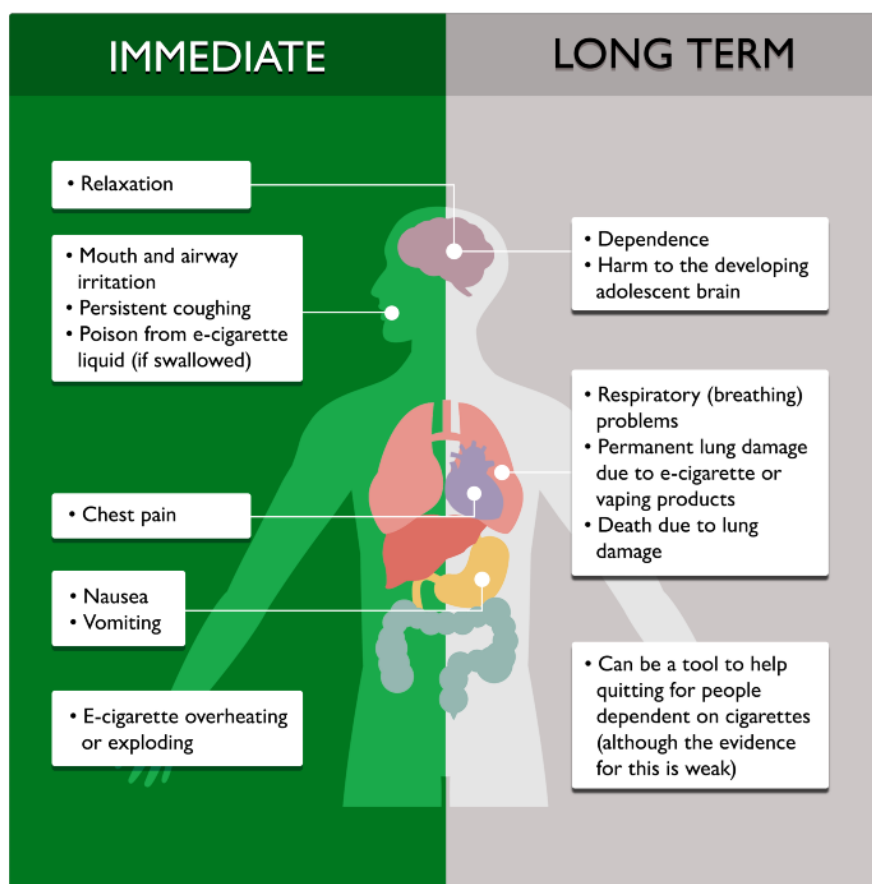
How many young people are using e-cigarettes?

According to the 2022/23 Australian Secondary School's Student Survey, around one third of students (30%) had used an e-cigarette at least once in their lifetime. Around 5% of students vaped regularly (vaping on 20 or more days in the past month). Among students who had tried vaping, over two thirds (69%) had never smoked a regular cigarette before they first vaped.

What are the effects of e-cigarettes?

The possible immediate and long-term effects of e-cigarettes are listed in the table below.

Immediate	Long-term
Mouth and airway irritation	Dependence (see glossary)
Relaxation	Respiratory (breathing) problems
Persistent coughing	Harm to the developing adolescent brain
Nausea	Can be a tool to help quitting for people dependent on cigarettes (although the evidence for this is weak)
Vomiting	Permanent lung damage due to e-cigarette or vaping products
Chest pain	Death due to lung damage
Poison from e-cigarette liquid (if swallowed)	
E-cigarette overheating or exploding	



Common e-cigarette myths

MYTH: E-cigarettes and vaping are harmless.

E-cigarettes do not generate smoke in the same way regular cigarettes do so they might seem safer. However, many of the chemicals in the 'flavoured' e-liquids have the potential to negatively impact the health of users and others inhaling the vapour. Additionally, many people order e-cigarettes online from overseas, in which case product labelling is not regulated. This means that products sold as 'nicotine-free' may actually contain nicotine.

MYTH: There is no link between e-cigarettes use and starting smoking regular cigarettes.

Evidence shows it is common for young people who use e-cigarettes to later on begin smoking cigarettes. E-cigarette use familiarises users to traditional smoking behaviours such as inhalation, exhalation, and even holding a cigarette. This means that even if young people use e-cigarettes without the nicotine, the smoking-related behaviours they pick up make it more likely they will transition to cigarette smoking.

E-cigarettes and the law

While people over 18-years can legally purchase e-cigarettes and e-cigarette products, it is illegal in Australia to buy or sell **nicotine** for use in e-cigarettes. However, laws for the use and marketing of e-cigarettes vary across Australia.

See below for State and Territory specific information.

Australian Capital Territory
New South Wales
Northern Territory
Queensland
South Australia
Tasmania
Victoria
Western Australia

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use and Associate Professor Becky Freeman from the School of Public Health at the University of Sydney.