

## Tobacco & E-cigarettes: 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:** Tobacco

**Tags:** cigarettes, cigars, chop-chop, smokes

**Time Allocated:** Partial lesson (under 45mins)

**Origin:** Australian

**Cost:**

Free

### Attachments

[↓ Health Effects of Tobacco: Detailed Resource \(for Parents/Teachers\)](#) [↓ Teenagers and Smoking: Detailed Resource \(for Parents/Teachers\)](#) [↓ Nicotine Addiction: Detailed Resource \(for Parents/Teachers\)](#) [↓ Quitting Smoking: Detailed Resource \(for Parents/Teachers\)](#)

## What are Tobacco and E-cigarettes?

Cigarettes are made from the dried and cured leaves of the tobacco plant. Nicotine is the key addictive drug in tobacco. Like heroin and cocaine, nicotine changes the way the brain works and causes cravings for more nicotine.

### Nicotine can be found in:

- Tailor-made manufactured cigarettes
- Roll-your-own cigarettes
- Cigars
- Pipe tobacco
- Water pipe tobacco (shisha, narghile)
- Chop-chop (illegal loose rolling tobacco)
- Herbal and spiced cigarettes
- E-cigarettes

### What else do cigarettes contain?

Research shows that cigarette smoke contains more than 7 000 chemicals, many of which are harmful toxins. These include:

- **Carbon monoxide** — this also comes out of car exhausts
- **Lead, mercury, chromium and cadmium** — toxic metals
- **Hydrogen cyanide** — used in larger doses in gas chambers
- **Ammonia** — found in cleaning products and added to cigarettes to increase the nicotine hit
- **Polonium 210** — a radioactive substance.

Some of the toxins in cigarette affect the mouth, throat and lungs, while others travel in the bloodstream throughout the body. The longer a person smokes, and the more often they smoke, the greater their risk of developing diseases such as lung cancer.

**Sometimes people believe that a certain type of tobacco, such as roll-your-own cigarettes, is more natural and healthier than manufactured 'tailor-made' cigarettes. This is not true. Inhaling smoke is harmful no matter what type of tobacco is used.**

### How many young people have tried cigarettes?

Smoking rates among school students have fallen greatly since the 1980s. According to the 2017 Australian secondary schools' survey, 1 in 14 students (7%) aged 12–17 reported they had smoked in the past month.

### What are the effects of cigarettes?

Even though smoking is legal, it doesn't mean that it's safe, or that it is less harmful than illegal drugs. In fact, smoking is responsible for more deaths than any other drug. Smoking is legal because it was already widely used and socially accepted before the health risks became understood.

The effects of tobacco smoking vary, but may include:

**Immediate**

- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Reduced oxygen to the brain and lungs
- Bad breath
- Stained teeth and fingers
- Shortness of breath
- Increased phlegm production
- Persistent coughing
- Constricted blood vessels.

**Long-term**

- Dependence (addiction)
- Dental problems
- Premature aging
- Reduced physical fitness
- Reduced fertility
- Respiratory (breathing) problems
- Increased risk of heart disease (smokers are 2-4 times more at risk)
- Lung disease (e.g., emphysema)
- Diabetes
- Cancer.

**What are the effects of second-hand smoke?**

Second-hand (passive) smoking occurs when people near a smoker breathe in the smoke. This is not safe and can have serious health effects including lung cancer and heart disease.

**Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes)**

Electronic cigarettes (also known as 'e-cigarettes' or vapes) are handheld electronic devices that mimic the effects of a tobacco cigarette but produce vapour instead of smoke when inhaled. The use of e-cigarettes is often referred to as 'vaping'.

According to the 2017 Australian Secondary School Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey, 13% of young people aged 12-17 have used e-cigarettes. Around half of these young people have never smoked a tobacco cigarette before trying an e-cigarette.

E-cigarettes containing nicotine are available in some countries but in Australia their sale is illegal. It is also against the law to sell e-cigarettes to young people under the age of 18. Different Australian states and territories have different laws surrounding e-cigarettes. Please refer to your state or territory Government website for the relevant information.

As e-cigarettes are a relatively recent phenomenon, there are no long-term studies that can establish their safety. Because of this, it is unclear whether vaping is any safer than smoking tobacco, and the long-term effects are currently unknown.

**Evidence Base**

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University.

**Download attachment** for more information and a list of sources.

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