

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), 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), 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 2017 Australian Secondary School's Student Survey, 1 in 8 students (13%) had used an e-cigarette at least once in their lifetime. Among students who had tried vaping, almost half (48%) had never smoked a regular cigarette.

What are the effects of e-cigarettes?

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

Immediate

- Mouth and airway irritation
- Relaxation
- Persistent coughing
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Chest pain
- Poison from e-cigarette liquid (if swallowed)
- E-cigarette overheating or exploding

Long-term

- Dependence (addiction)
- Respiratory (breathing) problems
- Harm to the developing adolescent brain
- Can be a tool to help quitting for people dependent on cigarettes (although the evidence for this is weak)
- Permanent lung damage due to e-cigarette or vaping products
- Death due to lung damage

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 Dr Becky Freeman from the School of Public Health at the University of Sydney.

Page last reviewed: 6 November 2020.