



# Vaping & e-cigarettes

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## Street names:

Vapes, vaping, pens, pods, electronic cigarettes, electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), e-cigs, electro-smoke, green cig, smartsmoker.

## What is vaping?

E-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that use a coil to heat a liquid to produce a vapour, which is inhaled – mimicking smoking. This is commonly referred to as ‘vaping’. E-cigarettes are mostly used to vape nicotine e-liquid solutions. Some devices can also be modified to inhale other drugs such as THC (cannabis) or nicotine-free ‘e-liquids’.

## What do they look like?

Devices usually resemble cigarettes, cigars or pipes, as well as everyday items such as pens, USB memory sticks, and larger cylindrical or rectangular devices.

## How do they work?

E-cigarettes use heat to transform a nicotine (or sometimes non-nicotine) e-liquid solution into vapour, which is then inhaled.

## Why do people vape?

People vape for various reasons, including:

- to help them reduce or quit smoking
- belief that they are less harmful than traditional cigarettes
- cheaper than traditional cigarettes
- taste better than traditional cigarettes due to flavouring.
- curiosity
- seen as more acceptable than traditional cigarettes

## Immediate and long-term effects:

The immediate effects of vaping are similar to those of other nicotine products, including tobacco. For more information about the immediate effects of nicotine, refer to the relevant [drug information card](#).

Since vaping is a relatively new phenomenon, the longer-term health effects are not fully known. While vaping may be less harmful than smoking conventional cigarettes, it is not without risks. The liquids used in illegal vapes contain a range of chemicals, some of which are toxic. Emerging evidence indicates that vaping of illegal products may be associated with severe lung disease.

## Common questions about vaping:

### What are the risks around vaping and young people?

The evidence regarding the harms associated with vaping among young people is still emerging. However, studies indicate that young people who start vaping are more likely to take up cigarette smoking than non-vaping peers. Additionally, rates of vaping appear to be higher among young people with mental health challenges.

### Can vaping lead to nicotine dependence?

Nicotine, found in many vaping products, is highly addictive. Continued use of nicotine vapes can lead to dependence. Withdrawal from nicotine can result in various symptoms, such as irritability, anxiety, intense cravings, difficulty concentrating, disrupted sleep patterns, and feelings of sadness or depression. Additionally, several illegal vaping products fail to disclose the presence of nicotine, despite containing it, often at very high concentrations.

### Is it a safer alternative than cigarettes?

While there is emerging evidence that vaping causes less harm than smoking cigarettes because vapes don't contain tobacco (which contains many toxic, cancer-causing chemicals), it's still not harmless. Although vapour produced by e-cigarettes is probably less harmful to bystanders than cigarette smoke, it is not completely risk-free.

There are known risks associated with any type of nicotine exposure on brain development, meaning that pregnant women and adolescents should avoid vaping. There are also risks linked to nicotine poisoning via ingestion and skin contact with the e-liquid solutions.

The manufacturing quality of illegal vaping devices is highly variable. Significant differences in product designs and the way people use them make it difficult to determine the potential level of nicotine

toxicity in each device or liquid.

Vaping devices can be modified to deliver higher, more harmful concentrations of nicotine, producing more toxic chemical particles in the inhaled vapour.

### Is vaping effective for smoking cessation?

There is emerging evidence to suggest that vaping is an effective smoking cessation aid. In fact, some studies have shown that vaping is, at least as effective as a combination of first line treatments, including NRT and varenicline. This may be due to the properties inherent to vaping which address both the chemical and behavioural components associated with nicotine dependence.

### What do RACGP and the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care recommend?

Currently, the [RACGP](#) suggest that vaping (in conjunction with behavioural support) may be appropriate for people who want to quit but have failed to quit smoking with first line treatments. Similarly, the [Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#) have suggested that there is insufficient evidence as yet to recommend vaping as a first line treatment for smoking cessation.

### Is Vaping Legal?

In Australia, as of 1 October 2024, the laws regarding vaping have changed:

People aged 18 years and over can purchase vapes with a nicotine concentration of 20 mg/mL or less from participating pharmacies without a prescription, where state and territory laws allow. This purchase requires a consultation with the pharmacist, which includes discussing the product, dosage, and other options to quit smoking or manage nicotine dependence. Proof of age is required, and only one month's

supply can be purchased at a time.

Individuals under 18 years require a prescription to purchase vapes, ensuring medical advice and supervision, where state and territory laws allow.

A prescription is needed for vapes with a nicotine concentration higher than 20 mg/mL, irrespective of age.

Permitted vape flavours are restricted to mint, menthol, and tobacco.

Vapes must have plain pharmaceutical packaging.

All vapes sold in pharmacies must meet specific standards and be notified to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

The law targets the commercial and criminal supply of vapes, not individuals possessing small amounts for personal use.

These regulations aim to ensure that vapes are used primarily for smoking cessation or nicotine management under medical supervision.

### Additional Considerations:

#### Prescribing Guidelines:

When prescribing nicotine vaping products (NVPs), healthcare providers should consider factors such as nicotine concentration, device type (with a preference for closed systems), and potential risks. It is essential to provide behavioural support and follow-up to monitor progress and address any adverse effects.

#### Specific Populations:

NVPs are not recommended for adolescents, pregnant, or breastfeeding women due to a lack of safety and efficacy data in these groups.

#### Role of Regulation:

The recent regulatory changes aim to improve product safety, reduce youth access, and ensure that vapes are used