



# WHAT ARE THE FACTS ON E-CIGARETTES

16-17 year-olds ask experts  
to explain the details...



An All Party Parliamentary Group on  
Primary Care and Public Health Report

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## Give us the facts on e-cigarettes, 16-17-year-olds urge experts

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Since the first electronic cigarettes arrived in the UK in 2007, their use has been growing fast. 2.1 million people now use them, up from 700,000 two years ago, and the numbers of these 'vapers' are expected to reach 3.5 million within the next few years. And UK sales of e-cigarettes – also known as vapourisers or electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) – are forecast to soar from close to £100 million currently to £350 million by 2015.

All the research suggests that e-cigarettes, which do not contain tobacco, are significantly safer – as well as a good deal cheaper – than conventional cigarettes. However, given the short time that they have been available, hard evidence for their safety is lacking. And they are currently sold as consumer products, without age restrictions, which is raising concerns that, for some children, they could be the first step on a path to tobacco use and, potentially, addiction.

With the publication of new rules on the advertising of e-cigarettes which seek to minimize their appeal to young people, and an upcoming government consultation on proposals to ban their sale to the under-18s, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Primary Care and Public Health recently held a roundtable meeting to discuss the key issues around e-cigarette use in children. Attending the meeting were policymakers, public health experts and a group of 16-17-year-olds, who are all students from Lampton School in Hounslow and The Brit School, Croydon.

### Who smokes?

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Only one of the seven students revealed to the roundtable meeting that she smokes every day, averaging about six cigarettes daily – and, she added: *"it's a bad habit."* Another reported that she smokes socially: *"my friends do it, so I just joined in."* Two of the boys said they had tried smoking but didn't like it – *"and anyway it's too expensive,"* added one. Both boys had also tried shisha – flavoured tobacco which is smoked through a waterpipe – but didn't like that either. *"It's a form of smoking fruit,"* said one, while the other pointed out that the flavourings in shisha contain nicotine – *"and I didn't want to get addicted."*

Three of the students said they had never tried either cigarettes or shisha because they have respiratory problems such as asthma. They do not ever intend to try smoking and they avoid cigarette smoke as much as possible, they told the panel.

The APPG's chairman, Sir Kevin Barron MP, asked the students: *"do you think attitudes to smoking in general are changing?"*

Their answers show that 16-17-year olds today have much greater understanding about the harmful effects of smoking than in the past, although they may not necessarily act on it. *"My older siblings and their friends used to smoke much more regularly, but my friends understand the risks,"* said one boy.

*"In my group we've all tried it, but only one or two smoke quite a bit. They don't believe they will get tarred-up lungs from smoking just one or two a day – but we think they will and we send them pictures to prove it,"* said another.

One girl who does not smoke because she has weak lungs said some of her friends smoke because they find it relaxing. *"Those of use who don't smoke don't care – provided we don't have to inhale their smoke,"* she added.

50% of smokers die prematurely, a percentage which has not changed despite the recent dramatic declines in numbers of people smoking. Young people do think about the health consequences of cigarettes, the group told the roundtable.

*"My friends use roll-ups rather than ordinary cigarettes because they believe that they're 'healthier' – organic and with no chemicals,"* said one boy.

## Why vape?

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**Is this concern over health risks prompting many young people to try electronic e-cigarettes instead?**

A survey published by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) in September found that only 1.8% of children aged 11-18 are vaping regularly, and that 90% of those who do so regularly or occasionally are already smokers or ex-smokers.

More than 80% of 11-18-year-olds are now aware of e-cigarettes, but over 90% of those surveyed said had not tried them even once, nor did they have any intention of doing so in the future, ASH reports.

Nevertheless, a number of the students at the APPG roundtable said they have friends who vape for a variety of reasons.

*"My friend who uses e-cigarettes thinks they are a lot healthier. And they are an excuse to smoke in other people's houses,"* said one of The Brit School students.

*“Social vaping – you don’t have to go outside and make a big point out of it,”* agreed another. *“I have a friend who used to smoke, but now he’s using e-cigarettes and shisha pens [portable electronic shisha smoking devices]. It’s a habit, a way of moving your hand, and when he’s using them it doesn’t register that they still contain nicotine,”* she added.

*“It’s about the hand movements – the habit,”* another agreed.

*“A close friend who was urged not to smoke now uses e-cigarettes because you can use them anywhere, but this is something that needs to change. I don’t think there is a taboo with vaping like there is with cigarettes. But it’s still nicotine – with e-cigarettes the addiction is eroded, but it is still there,”* said one of the Lampton School boys.

Is the lower cost a motivation? *“Yes – and the risk of developing a proper addiction,”* responded the only daily smoker among the students. But, she added, she also smokes roll-ups because they are cheaper. *“Some shops question my age, some don’t,”* she told the panel.

## **An education ‘minefield’**

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The ASH survey reveals that young people generally have all the latest information about e-cigarettes. Most understand that they contain nicotine, that they are less dangerous and less addictive for users than cigarettes, and much less harmful to bystanders.

But relatively little is known about the long-term effects of e-cigarettes, and these unknowns, plus the lack of regulatory controls, has created ‘a minefield’ for educators, the APPG was told.

*“We know the dangers of tobacco so we know how to deal with this in the classroom, what is acceptable in a sixth form. But we don’t know how to deal with e-cigarettes,”* said Stuart French, director of technical theatre arts at The Brit School.

These are legal consumer products, but they need to come under some formal controls, including curbs to prevent advertising which seeks to glamorise them and on claims made for their benefits which cannot be proven, plus age restrictions on access, Mr French told the panel. *“These would give us a much clearer message to give to our students,”* he said.

Both schools represented at the roundtable have discussed smoking with their students through their PSHE (personal, social, health and economic) and Citizenship programmes, but the effectiveness of this is limited.

*"I know all the reasons not to smoke but some people choose not to listen. And my friends tell me it's OK,"* said one girl. *"You listen to your friends more than your parents,"* added another.

And those who do use tobacco all said they plan to stop – sometime. *"I can go without smoking for a few weeks and I don't plan to become a regular smoker,"* said a social smoker, while the one daily user added: *"I hope I won't become a regular smoker. I do plan to stop, but not yet."*

Some of the students were highly critical of the way their schools are currently tackling the issue of smoking. *"In our Citizenship classes it's all 'don't, don't, don't,' and that causes some students to rebel, to go the other way because we're just being told what to do. The way this is presented needs to change – just tell us the cold facts and we'll make a decision,"* said one Lampton School boy.

*"And we know some of our teachers who tell us not to smoke but they do it themselves – that's hypocritical,"* added a girl from The Brit School.

The students also reported that their schools aren't warning them about possible problems with e-cigarettes. *"I don't know what the bad side-effects of e-cigarettes are – I do know what they are with tobacco,"* said one.

## Advertising the 'glamour'

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So, Sir Kevin asked them, what perceptions do they have of e-cigarettes?

*"Advertising posters present them as glamorous, cool, sexy, something everyone should be doing, as a good thing,"* said one smoker in the group. *"If e-cigarettes are found not to do the harm that cigarettes do then, yes, they can be glamorised, but they haven't been around long enough for us to know the long-term effects. My smoking friends won't use them,"* she added.

Advertising of e-cigarettes is legal, and controls on their promotion through the EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) are not due to come into effect until 2016. However, on October 9, the UK Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)'s Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) published additional new rules on their advertising, taking effect November 10. These emphasise the protection of young people and the avoidance of anything that promotes the use of a tobacco product or shows its use in a positive light.

Shahriar Coupal, director of the ASA and the CAP, attended the APPG roundtable discussion, and told the meeting that the ASA is particularly concerned about glamorising the use of e-cigarettes to the under-18s, promotion of health benefits and the use of celebrities. *"Endorsement by active sports stars would be a strict no-no, I would imagine. But to an adult audience? Judgement calls can be very difficult,"* he cautioned.

## A gateway to tobacco use?

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Sir Kevin wondered is there a danger that people who use e-cigarettes will then move onto tobacco. Most of the students felt this was unlikely, although one did have concerns that they could be a gateway to nicotine, as cannabis can be to class A drugs. And, he pointed out, e-juice (the liquid mixture of nicotine, flavourings and dilutants that are vapourised by e-cigarettes) flavoured with tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) – the active ingredient in marijuana, can be put into e-cigarettes.

Generally, the students expressed strong support for strict controls on how e-cigarettes can be advertised, and felt that advertising should be informative and both age- and health-appropriate.

*“A kiosk in my shopping mall advertises e-cigarettes as ‘like shisha’ but it’s not – this is false advertising,”* said a Lampton School student.

One boy called for a complete ban on advertising, and for cigarettes and e-cigarettes to be kept behind shop counters. *“That way, the idea of using them won’t come into our minds,”* he said.

But Shahriar Coupal pointed out that most users of e-cigarettes are adults, and therefore a legitimate audience for advertising. He asked: would a ban be fair on them?

*“These products damage adults as well – we just need to get rid of this attitude altogether,”* the student responded.

E-cigarettes are used almost entirely by adults who are trying to give up tobacco, and new research indicates that a regular user of e-cigarettes is six times more likely to give up smoking, said Martin Dockrell, tobacco control lead at Public Health England. If this is true, he asked the students: would it change your view on advertising?

They generally agreed that smokers need to be aware if there is an opportunity to help them stop, and several suggested that this should be the message of e-cigarette advertising.

*“Have them solely as a replacement for people who want to beat their addiction. Make this a medical issue, not about glamorising them,”* advised one student. *“Yes, and with doctors helping you,”* another agreed.

But several said that if they were trying to give up tobacco they would prefer to use nicotine replacement therapy such as patches and pills rather than e-cigarettes, and pointed out, again, that not enough is known yet about the effects of vaping.

*"If you're going to glamorise e-cigarettes, you need substantial proof of their benefits. Before they came onto the market, nicotine patches and gum were enough to help people stop smoking. Are e-cigarettes enough of a gateway to help people give up?"* asked one.

*"The point of advertising is to sell something. You can't say that it will make your life so much better if we don't know the full facts,"* said another.

Two-thirds of adult smokers say they want to give up, but only a third of those aged under 18 do. So how effective are e-cigarettes likely to be in getting younger smokers to give up tobacco?

The panel was unsure. *"They know that e-cigarettes are safer but they are not willing to change, to be told what to do,"* commented Dr Andy McEwen, director of the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training.

## The government view

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***"We want to see advertising controlled,"*** Jeremy Mean, deputy director for tobacco control and responsibility deal at the Department of Health, told the roundtable.

*"The new advertising rules aim to ensure that e-cigarettes are promoted in a responsible way. In particular, protecting young people is top priority and this is why we are changing the law to ban the sale of e-cigarettes to under-18s.*

*We see potential public health benefits from e-cigarettes but we also have residual concerns about their potential for luring people into smoking."*

Mr Mean added, *"We recognise that e-cigarettes may have a role in helping smokers quit and higher strength products can already be licensed to help people. New European rules will cover and limit advertising of lower strength e-cigarettes. We will consult on the need for any further rules on advertising of e-cigarettes in spring 2015 as part of our plans to implement the European Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) in May 2016."*

*"In 1970, half of all adults in the UK were smokers. That has now dropped to under 18%. In the young, the percentage has fallen from 15% to under 8%. We don't want to encourage something that might lead to smoking, and we need the evidence – if they are a safe alternative to smoking, or whether they lead people on to start or keep on smoking,"* said Mr Mean.

One student told him: *"my dad does both. He says e-cigarettes don't give the same effect – they make you want 'a real fag'."*

*“But the declines in smoking rates have gone up at the same time as the arrival of vaping. We don’t want to jeopardise that fast acceleration,”* Martin Dockrell urged.

Sir Kevin Barron asked: what if, as a result of advertising, all or even half of the 2.1 million people in the UK who now use e-cigarettes came off tobacco? Should we do anything to stop this potential benefit?

*“The government view is there should be safeguards, clear labeling and quality standards – not having them would remove the potential for public health benefit,”* replied Jeremy Mean. *“But we don’t know enough, we’re learning as we go along,”* he added.

Professor Richard Parish, chair of the National Pharmacy and Public Health Forum, agreed. *“The research is playing catch-up,”* he said. *“So should we err on the side of caution? Or allow advertising and then, if the research shows that there is harm, put restrictions in place. Should the approach we take be precautionary, or wait-and-see?”*

Two of the students were emphatic that the approach should be precautionary, and Shahriar Coupal agreed. *“Young people aren’t being told about the harm, the toxicity associated with e-cigarettes,”* he said.

Dr Alan Stanton, consultant paediatrician and member of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, expressed concern at the use of the term ‘smoking’ when talking about using e-cigarettes. He asked: *“Is there a danger that years of anti-smoking messages could be rolled back by e-cigarettes’ perceived glamour?”*

## Access, availability and quality

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The students told the panel just how cheap and easy it is for under-18s to buy e-cigarettes. *“If you’re aged 16 or below you can buy them – that’s bad, they’re just there on the counter, and you can buy e-juice from pound shops for just £1,”* they said. One agreed that there should be age restrictions but, he asked: *“who should regulate? Trading standards? The local council?”*

*“I didn’t realise people aged under 18 can buy them legally. The legal age should be 18, and people need to know that they are not all good. You should be aiming to give up altogether,”* said the daily smoker.

Another concern is the thriving black market in e-cigarettes, given that these are not standardised products and there are no quality controls on their ingredients.

Several students called for e-cigarette labeling to include printed lists of ingredients, as in food products, as well as warnings – and that these should be big enough to read. Many young people are already used to reading food product ingredient labeling because of allergy, dietary, religious and other reasons, they pointed out.

Quality control is necessary – some e-cigarettes have been found to contain ingredients such as formaldehyde and heavy metals, said Richard Parish, and he suggested that perhaps they should be sold through licensed premises only, both to assure product quality and prevent opportunistic purchasing.

The students were not sure. *“Black marketeers would just buy them from licensed sellers and sell them on – this would just create more hard work for shopkeepers,”* one told him.

*“But we need some form of regulation around access and where they can be bought. The evidence so far is that they are important for people who want to give up cigarettes,”* said Andy McEwen. And Martin Dockrell described a recent study of smokers who didn’t want to give up but were given e-cigarettes. Out of a total of 400, 10%-12% of them have now actually quit, he said.

*“We could take five million people out of tobacco use – the real risk is over-regulation,”* added Shahriar Coupal.

But Alan Stanton was cautious, pointing out that the evidence to show whether e-cigarettes lead people on to tobacco or help them come off it just isn’t there yet. He asked: *“do the tobacco companies have this evidence? They are very good at recruiting new young smokers and advertising nicotine products in a cool, glamorous way. And what could be more attractive to them than something that they can’t legally obtain until they reach the age of 18?”*

## The role of parents

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Official statistics estimate that around three-quarters of children have never smoked, although those whose parents or siblings smoke are three times more likely to do so than those who live in a home where nobody smokes.

Many young people are introduced to tobacco by their parents – they buy cigarettes for them, said Andy McEwen. He asked the students: *“would you accept e-cigarettes from your parents?”*

*“No, because I don’t know what’s in them,”* replied a social smoker, while the only daily smoker was equally firm: *“If I was offered an e-cigarette for my first smoke, my answer would be – no thanks! I think they should be used solely as replacements for cigarettes.”*

Advertising and promotion of e-cigarettes should be as nicotine replacement therapy – not glamorised, Jeremy Mean emphasised. And in their summing-up, the students generally seemed to agree with him.

*“We need to know more about the health implications. E-cigarettes have only been introduced very recently – and for all we know, they might actually be worse than cigarettes,” said one, while another called for “tighter regulation, more warnings and lists of ingredients.”*

*“Advertising should be limited and should tell us what is in e-cigarettes, and there must be controls on where you can buy them. They shouldn’t be sold through pound shops – they don’t sell alcohol, after all – and they wouldn’t do anything to stop us buying them,” one girl told the experts.*

And if the general view is that e-cigarettes should be advertised and promoted as nicotine replacement therapy only, one student asked: *“should you be able to get them anywhere – off-licenses, corner shops, for example – or should they be sold in pharmacies only, where you can also get proper advice?”*

## The CAP’s new rules on e-cigarettes state that:

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- Ads must not be likely to appeal particularly to people under 18, especially by reflecting or being associated with youth culture;
- People shown using e-cigarettes or playing a significant role must neither be, nor seem to be, under 25;
- Ads must not be directed at people under 18 through the selection of media or the context in which they appear;
- Ads must not encourage non-smokers or non-nicotine users to use e-cigarettes; and
- Ads must make clear that the product is an e-cigarette and not a tobacco product.

Ads on TV and radio will be subject to scheduling restrictions to reduce the chance of e-cigarette advertisements being seen or heard by children. And unless manufacturers obtain an authorisation for their product from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), ads for e-cigarettes cannot convey health benefits or claim that they are ‘safer’ or ‘healthier’ than smoking tobacco.

The Committee says it will closely monitor the effect of the rules and conduct a formal review after 12 months.

The logo for PAGB, consisting of the letters 'PAGB' in white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a dark blue, rounded rectangular background with a diagonal cut on the right side.

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The background of the page features a soft, abstract image of light-colored, possibly white or pale pink, fabric or paper that is draped and folded, creating a sense of movement and texture. The lighting is diffused, giving it a dreamy, ethereal quality.