

Smoking and Vaping: Advice for Parents

Help your child understand the facts and the health risks of smoking and vaping.

What is smoking and vaping?

Smoking is burning something to breathe smoke into the lungs, such as a cigarette. Vaping is breathing in vapor from heated liquid.

Both smoking and vaping involve breathing in chemicals that can harm your health.

E-cigarettes or vapes heat liquid to create an aerosol that is breathed in, which is known as vaping. E-cigarettes can look like a highlighter, a pen or USB.

What is in vaping liquid?

There are no quality or safety standards for e-cigarettes, vapes or vaping liquids.

Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine which is harmful and addictive. Even those labelled nicotine-free can still contain nicotine.

The aerosol or vapor from e-cigarettes contains cancer-causing chemicals and heavy metals.

How vaping affects your child's body

Vaping can cause significant harm to your child's body:

- Short-term it can cause vomiting, nausea, coughing, shortness of breath, mouth irritation and asthma
- Long-term it can cause lung damage, heart disease and cancers.

E-cigarettes are still being studied, but most experts think it is likely vaping will cause lung and mouth cancers.

Nicotine is a poison that can make people sick if swallowed, and it has been linked to deaths of small children.

Exposing children and teens to nicotine can harm their brain development and lead to higher risk of dependence. Children and teens who use e-cigarettes are more than three times more likely to move onto smoking cigarettes.

E-cigarettes can also explode and catch fire.

Protecting your child

Research shows that children are less likely to smoke or vape if their primary role models (typically parents or carers) do not smoke or vape.

If you have found quitting difficult and still smoke or vape, share your experiences with your child. Ask your children for their support during your next quit attempt. If your child can witness how tough quitting can be, they may want to steer clear of smoking or vaping completely.

The best way to protect your children is to never smoke or vape in the house or other places where there may be children nearby. Smoking or vaping in a car when children are present is illegal. Passive exposure to e-cigarette aerosol can be damaging for children and young people.

Vaping laws

Smoking and vaping is banned in and around schools

The Tobacco Act 1987 bans smoking or vaping on school premises or within 4 metres of any pedestrian access point to school premises. The smoking and vaping ban applies to:

- anyone present on school premises during and outside of school hours including students, teachers, and school visitors
- all activities that take place on school premises.

Smoking and vaping are also not permitted during school events and excursions held off school premises.

Health and retail laws

It is illegal for any person:

- to sell, barter or exchange any type of tobacco or e-cigarette product to a person under 18 years of age
- to possess an e-cigarette containing nicotine, unless they have a doctor's prescription
- to smoke or vape in a motor vehicle if a person under 18 years is also present in the motor vehicle.

You can report retailers selling e-cigarette products to children to your local council.

Talking to your child or teen about smoking and vaping

As a parent or carer, you have an important role in protecting your child from smoking and vaping. Parent views on smoking and vaping can influence their children's behaviours. The most important thing you can do is to talk to your child or teen about smoking, vaping and other drugs.

Use these strategies to talk with your child or teen.

Start with information

Get the key facts, learn the basics about smoking and vaping products, and think through what you want to say. Consider some questions you might be asked, and how you want to respond.

Approach it calmly

Start the conversation when you're doing an activity together, such as driving or preparing a meal. Keep things casual and relaxed. Use something you saw in a TV show or on the news as a chance to bring up the issue.

Don't make assumptions

If you think your child may have tried smoking or vaping, avoid making accusations. Some experts do not recommend searching your child's space for evidence of smoking or vaping, because it can undermine their trust.

Avoid judging or lecturing

Listen to their point of view and keep it a two-way conversation. Being mindful to keep your body language and tone respectful can go a long way. If your child has tried smoking or vaping, consider asking questions like: 'what made you want to try?' and 'how did it make you feel?'

Don't exaggerate

Make sure you are honest about potential harms and avoid exaggerated statements.

Focus on health and explain your concerns

Talk about how you care about your child's health. For example, if your child tells you they are smoking or vaping, you can say you are concerned about the health risks and share the evidence that this can affect adolescent brain development and risk of cancer.

Where to get help

Support and resources are available to help you talk to your child about smoking and vaping

Quit Victoria

Offers resources, information and support for people to quit smoking and vaping as well as factsheets for parents and children. www.quit.org.au/articles/teenvaping

The Royal Children's Hospital

The e-cigarettes and teens factsheet has information on how to talk to teens about the health risks of using e-cigarettes and a podcast episode on vaping created by paediatricians.

www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/E-cigarettes_and_teens

Better Health Channel

Information on the health effects of smoking, strategies for quitting, statistics and Victoria's laws on smoking, the dangers of e-cigarettes, liquid used in e-cigarettes and the dangers of nicotine poisoning. www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/smoking-and-tobacco

Your family doctor

Your family doctor is a good place to start for further information and advice regarding smoking and vaping and your child.

Advice services

- **Quitline** provide advice and confidential counselling, including for children from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday. Phone 13 78 48 or go to www.quit.org.au
- **DirectLine** is a state-wide alcohol and other drugs advice service offering confidential counselling and referral 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Phone 1800 888 236 or go to www.directline.org.au
- **Youth, Drugs and Alcohol Advice** provide a youth-specific advice service from 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday. Phone 1800 458 685
- **Alcohol and Drug Foundation** advice line 1300 85 85 84
- **Headspace** offer mental health support online, by phone and in person through headspace centres. Go to www.headspace.org.au

More information

This factsheet has been prepared using information and research from:

- QUIT - www.quit.org.au/articles/teenvaping
- Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/smoking-and-tobacco
- Royal Children's Hospital - www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/E-cigarettes_and_teens
- Alcohol and Drug Foundation - <https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/parenting/vaping-youth/talking-about-vaping/>
- Cancer Council Victoria - www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au
- Tobacco Act 1987 - www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/tobacco-act-1987/095