

Cross Party Group on Smoking and Health

E-Cigarettes: An Evidence Update

READING PACK

Meeting Focus

Recent research from the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) at King's College London has found that the use of vaping products rather than smoking leads to a substantial reduction in exposure to toxicants that implicate:

- Cancer
- Lung disease
- Cardiovascular disease

The research was comprised within an independent report on vaping, which was commissioned by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID).

The report found that:

- While vaping is not risk free (particularly for people who have never smoked), it poses a small fraction of the health risks of smoking in the short to medium term.

The report reviewed many aspects of vaping, including:

- Who is vaping and what products are used.
- Vaping's effects on health (both absolute and compared with smoking).
- Public perceptions of vaping's harms.
- Biomarkers of exposure (measures of potentially harmful substance levels in the body).
- Biomarkers of potential harm (measures of biological changes in the body).

The strongest evidence, and where there was a greater volume of research, came from biomarkers of exposure. An exploration of the available studies found that levels of tobacco specific nitrosamines, volatile organic compounds and other toxicants implicated in the main diseases caused by smoking were found at significantly lower levels in vapers.

When comparing biomarkers between people who vape and people who don't smoke or vape, they were often similar, but in some cases, there was higher exposure when vaping. The investigators therefore concluded that whilst less harmful than smoking, vaping is likely to sustain some risks particularly for people who have never smoked.

While the research was clear on the reduced harms of vaping compared to smoking, it found that public perceptions often fell behind current research. In 2021, only 34% of English adults who smoked accurately perceived that vaping was less harmful than smoking, while only 14% of English adult smokers knew that nicotine wasn't the primary cause of the health risks connected to smoking tobacco.

The report has been cited as the most comprehensive review on vaping to date, and reviewed over 400 international studies.

In this meeting we will hear the research findings, and focus on:

- Health risks of vaping compared to smoking.
- Second-hand vape exposure (risks).
- E-cigarettes within smoking cessation services (effectiveness).
- Reflections on vaping's long-term harms.

To read the independent report in full, please click [here](#).

Cochrane Evidence Update (Nov 2022)

A recent review published by the Cochrane Library finds high certainty evidence that people are more likely to stop smoking for at least six months using nicotine e-cigarettes, or 'vapes', than using nicotine replacement therapies, such as patches and gums.

Evidence also suggested that nicotine e-cigarettes led to higher quit rates than e-cigarettes without nicotine, or no stop smoking intervention, but less data contributed to these analyses.

The updated Cochrane review includes 78 studies in over 22,000 participants. The update was published this month (Nov 2022) and can be found in full [here](#).

How is this research relevant to Wales?

Public Misperceptions in Wales

Public misperceptions on the relative harms of vaping are apparent in Wales. According to ASH Cymru's annual YouGov survey (2022) ¹:

¹ ASH Cymru [YouGov Smoke-free Survey](#) 2022

- 33% of Welsh adults, including 32% of smokers, wrongly believe e-cigarettes to be as harmful or more harmful than tobacco cigarettes, a significant increase from 25% in 2018.

This is consistent with ASH UK's Smoke-free GB adult survey (2022), which found that ²:

- 33% of GB adults believed vaping was more or equally as harmful as smoking.

Smoking Cessation in Wales

According to the National Survey for Wales:

- E-cigarettes are the most common tool to quit smoking (45% of methods used) ³.
- 76% of current e-cigarette users state that their main reason for using e-cigarettes is to help them stop smoking ^{4 5}.

In this meeting, we will briefly cover e-cigarettes' role within the smoking cessation field (efficacy).

Towards a Unified Position

Currently, there is not a unified approach on the use of electronic cigarettes in Wales. The newly released Tobacco Control Strategy for Wales (A Smoke-free Wales) has committed to the following within the strategy's first delivery plan:

Explore the role of e-cigarettes and other nicotine products for smoking cessation ⁶.

Welsh Government are currently formulating a position statement on e-cigarettes, which is expected to be published at the start of next year (2023).

Balance

According to the tobacco control organisation ASH Cymru, it is important to strike a balance when formulating policy and action on e-cigarettes in Wales. Such a balance would:

- Protect children, youth and 'never smokers' from using vaping products.
- Avoid placing barriers to less-harmful tobacco alternatives: within smoking cessation efforts in Wales.

² ASH UK [Use of e-cigarettes among adults in Great Britain](#) 2022

³ NSW [Smoking Bulletin: Adult Smoking and E-cigarette Use](#) 2018-2019

⁴ NSW [Smoking Bulletin: Adult Smoking and E-cigarette Use](#) 2018-2019

⁵ Welsh Government [Towards a Smoke-free Wales: Delivery Plan 2022-2024](#) 2022

⁶ Welsh Government [Towards a Smoke-free Wales: Delivery Plan 2022-2024](#) 2022

ASH Cymru Policy Stance on E-cigarettes

In light of the above, ASH Cymru holds the following policy stance:

- If you don't smoke, don't vape: as vaping is not risk-free.
- Vaping is not recommended for children, youth, and never smokers.
- However, vaping is significantly less harmful than smoking. E-cigarettes should be framed as holding a fraction of the risks of tobacco and supported as an evidence-based smoking cessation tool in Wales.

Data

National Survey for Wales (Welsh Adults)

- 13% of Welsh adults currently smoke ⁷.
- 6% of Welsh adults currently use an e-cigarette ⁸.
- 14% of Welsh adults were recorded as ever-using e-cigarettes ⁹.
- E-cigarettes are the most common method used to quit smoking (45% of methods used) ¹⁰.
- 76% of current e-cigarette users state that their main reason for using e-cigarettes is to help to stop smoking ^{11 12}.

ASH UK: Smoke-Free GB Survey (GB Adults) ¹³

- 8.3% of GB adults currently vape (4.3 million people in Great Britain).
- Most current GB vapers are ex-smokers (57%).
- Only 1.3% of never smokers are current vapers, amounting to 8.1% of GB vapers.
- 35% of current vapers also smoked (dual users).
- The proportion of NRT users who also smoke is 41% (NRT dual users).

SHRN: Student Health and Wellbeing Survey (Welsh Youth) ¹⁴

- More than 1 in 5 (22%) young people reported having ever tried an e-cigarette (2019/20).
- 3% of young people reported at least weekly e-cigarette use (2019/2020).

⁷ NSW. [National Survey for Wales](#). 2021-2022

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ NSW [Smoking Bulletin: Adult Smoking and E-cigarette Use](#) 2018-2019

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Welsh Government [Towards a Smoke-free Wales: Delivery Plan 2022-2024](#) 2022

¹³ ASH UK [Use of e-cigarettes among adults in Great Britain](#) 2022

¹⁴ SHRN [Student Health & Wellbeing Survey](#) 2021

ASH UK: Smoke-Free GB Survey (GB Youth) ¹⁵

- In 2022, 15.8% of 11–17-year-olds had tried vaping, compared to 11.2% in 2021, and 13.9% in 2020.
- In 2022, 7.0% of 11–17-year-olds were current vape users, compared to 3.3% in 2021, and 4.1% in 2020.
- 83.8% of 11–17-year-olds have never tried or are unaware of e-cigarettes.
- Use among 11–17-year-olds who have never smoked remains low and largely experimental. While 7.5% of never smokers have tried an e-cigarette in 2022, only 1.7% report at least monthly use.
- The misperception that e-cigarettes are more than or equally harmful as tobacco cigarettes has risen from 2013 onwards. In 2022 misperceptions stood at 40.9%, the same as in 2020.
- In 2022, for the first time the most frequently used product was a disposable vape (52.0% compared to 7.7% in 2021), with the most popular brands by far being Elf Bar and Geek Bar.

¹⁵ ASH UK [Use of E-cigarettes Among Young People in Great Britain](#) 2022